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Edited by Sylvia Laing and Michael Murphy

1993 Seabird studies on Foula

This previews how the 1993 breeding season fared for seabirds on the island of Foula on the west coast of the Shetland mainland. This study has been carried out over the past 20 years by Dr Bob Furness of Glasgow University and various students and researchers under Bob's supervision.

In 1993 10 or 11 pairs of Red-throated Divers attempted to breed in Foula. One pair deserted their eggs when the loch was drained and dredged to allow maintenance hydroelectric work to be carried out. All the other sites had at least one chick hatch, and a very late brood of two tiny chicks was noted on 12th July; this may have been a replacement clutch from the site that was deserted. A total of 11 chicks were caught, measured, ringed and colour-ringed on 30th July. During the efforts to catch these chicks two adults were also caught and ringed. All chicks appeared to be fed on sandeels up to 12 July, when the food brought in was gadids of 14-20 cm length, which were thought to be saithe. Of the 11 chicks ringed all were thought to have fledged giving a production of 1.0 per pair, equal to the highest recorded on Foula since records began in 1956.

Nesting success in Fulmars was higher than it had been for some years. 26 adults ringed in previous years were retrapped, and added to retrap data from previous seasons, thus enabling survival rates to be estimated. Food samples were obtained from most of the 76 adults handled (some caught more than once), and also most of the chicks, giving a total of 86 food samples. Most of these were of fish varying from sandeels to whitefish, with only three samples consisting of crustaceans.

Most of the Shags had half-grown young by mid-July, with numbers of nests appearing similar to last year, with most brood sizes of two or three chicks, and very few single broods recorded. A 24-hour count of Shags passing round South Ness from the west coast breeding areas to east coast feeding grounds on 12/13 July revealed a total of 8895 Shags flying east and 9211 flying west. A count in 1992 (on the same date) gave 7673 east and 8574 west. The higher count in 1993 may reflect the high breeding success this year and hence larger food demands of broods, rather than any increase in Shag numbers.

Fulmars experienced a higher breeding success in 1993.
Fulmar with chick *J F Young*

A count of Eiders made on the 10th July recorded 23 males, 45 females and 17 ducklings North of Ham and 10 males, 24 females and 3 ducklings South of Ham, although some females were still incubating or remaining on inland pools at this time. A further count was made on 31st July and this located 134 males mainly between Gaada Stack and Kittiwake's Haa which is further northwest than in previous years. In addition there were 88 Females with a total of 18 ducklings of varying ages including a brood of 5 recently hatched. Bonxies were the main predators of female Eiders at nest sites and at least 6 corpses were found in the main nesting area.

Out of 78 individual adult Arctic Skuas recognisable from markings or colour rings 66 returned to Foula and all but 3 of these held territory in 1993. Only 144 birds were on territory (15 less than in 1992) and 141 of these laid clutches. Despite predation by Bonxies which accounted for at least 12 chicks, and 3 fledglings being killed as a result of collisions with a plane and a motor vehicle, 151 chicks are estimated to have fledged successfully by 31st July. A further 83 adults were colour-ringed, some by nest trapping and some by a far more successful method of placing a stuffed Bonxie as a decoy and catching the attacking birds by using a mist net. Several adults regurgitated what they were carrying and of these samples all contained Sandeels. However, after the 12th July the food supply appeared to be very poor, with low adult attendance. During late

evening in the period 12-18 July some territories with chicks were left unattended, a practice not noticed in previous years though it may have been overlooked.
Of the adults caught in 1992 and 1993, 42 already carried rings, 34 having been ringed as chicks, mostly on Foula, but some were immigrants from other Shetland colonies. The ages of these birds varied from 4 to 22 years of age, but rather few were of young birds only one being 4 years old and four 5 years old, suggesting a fairly low recruitment rate to the colony in recent years despite the rise in breeding numbers from 1979 to 1990.

Adult survival of Great Skua (Bonxie) has yet to be calculated, but, assuming all individuals that survived returned to territories, 74 colour ringed birds of known ages survived from 1992 to 1993. This represents 88%, which is rather better than had been the case in previous years of Sandeel shortage, but lower than in the 1970s. It was clear however that breeding numbers had decreased from last year. Numbers of non-breeding birds were especially low, even compared with the low numbers recorded in 1992. Midday / early afternoon clubs of non breeders counted between 8-15th July gave a total of 113 birds compared to 196 birds on 9th July 1992. The decrease in breeding numbers and even greater decrease in non-breeding clubs indicate that the elevated rate of recruitment due to increased adult mortality over recent years of Sandeel shortages has almost dried up the pool of potential recruits. Given that chick production over the years from which recruits should come over the next three to four years has been very poor, further declines are inevitable.

A total of 844 chicks were ringed giving a large sample of weights and measurements and food samples. Most chicks handled before 12th July regurgitated samples of Sandeels; however during early July it was also common to see spilt Sandeels on territories. After 12 July few Sandeel samples appeared and most gave whitefish, but a few samples contained Herring, Mackerel, Squid or birdmeat. Sample of pellets at the clubs indicated that non breeders were feeding predominantly on Whitefish, though Sandeels were quite well represented in May and June. Breeding birds also fed extensively on Whitefish, with very few otoliths of Flatfish collected, although casual observations suggested much more Saithe and Norway Pout than in previous years. Norway Pout seemed to appear in great quantities during July, and was also noticeable in Fulmar regurgitates.

Great Skua (Bonxie) on nest. Further declines are expected in the next few years.

William S Paton

Chick predation was slight before 12th July but between then and the 30th July about 30% of chicks that had been raised until 12th July were killed, in varying frequency over the island. On the western side of Foula predation seemed to be less, but this also coincided with lower density. Adult attendance at the territory fell to very low levels around 12th July, supporting the evidence from other species that the Sandeels had become much more difficult to find.

No noticeable change in the breeding numbers of gulls was noted in 1993, and the breeding success of gulls was generally high, with many pairs tending broods of three well grown chicks in July. Numbers of Great Black-backed Gulls roosting gave several counts of 140-150 birds, rather higher than in the last few years, with counts of over 250 birds in total. Pellets collected indicate greater feeding opportunities both of Sandeels, and especially of discards from fishing vessels near Foula, particularly discards of large Gadids with a lot of Saithe.

Weights and measurements were taken for 20 Kittiwake chicks, which showed that they appeared to be in good condition. Out of four regurgitated food samples 3 were of Sandeels and one Whitefish. Breeding was late in 1993, and numbers well down on previous years with 48 at occupied nests at Logat compared to 83 in 1990 and 160 at Kittiwakes Haa (246 in 1990). On 12th July most nests contained downy chicks and fledging did not start until around 20th July and even then most nests had chicks that were a week or so too young to fly; the average varied from 0.90 to 1.00 chicks per pair.

1500 pairs of Arctic Terns is about the same as 1992, although the colony was slightly less compact in 1993. At least 1100 chicks fledged overall, with the main fledging period being around 12th/15th July. Although the total number fledged may have been slightly higher this is difficult to assess as smaller chicks could not readily be counted, and some fledglings had departed by the time the later chicks began to fledge.Sandeels featured as the main prey item during courtship feeding and feeding of chicks until mid-July when about 200 late-hatched chicks died apparently due to a food shortage. At least 50 fledglings were killed by aircraft and there was some evidence of predation or scavenging by cats, with 20-40 partly-eaten carcasses close to the Hametoun dyke; a few chicks were found with a wing or leg(s) missing, although the wound healed, suggesting biting by sheep, but this was only seen on about 6 chicks. The main cause of chick mortality in 1993 appears to be starvation.

Bonxie chasing a Tern

Barry Larking

Surprisingly large numbers of Guillemots still had chicks on 8th July, suggesting a rather late breeding season this year. A number of adults were caught and weighed which showed that they were all within the normal range, and a sample of 32 chicks weighed suggests that they too were in good condition. Several chicks had wing lengths over 80mm which is rather longer than the normal fledging length. Sandeels of about 14cm in length featured predominantly in birds seen coming in to feed chicks.

Although Razorbill numbers seemed to be no higher than in 1992, their breeding success was good. Many birds brought in Sandeels of about 8 cm to their chicks.

Guillemots and chicks. S.M.D. Alexander

A count of Black Guillemots revealed at least 87 nests around the island. Chicks were ringed at 7 nests, another 6 nests contained chicks too small to ring, and one or possibly two nests had already been left by fledged young. Again, Sandeels of 12-16 cm were brought in along with a few Butterfish of a similar size.

A few starving Puffin chicks appeared at the burrow entrances in 1993 although large numbers of adults were seen carrying food, again mainly Sandeels 6-8cm in length. At least 30 fledgling Puffins were killed by Bonxies, their remains being found in Bonxie territories all over Foula. It is thought that these birds were probably wandering around the island in the early morning after landing on the island after fledging.

We thank Bob Furness and the Applied Ornithology Unit at Glasgow University for allowing us to use these data.

1993 Conference - Aviemore

A more relaxed atmosphere pervaded the Badenoch Hotel than in 1992. People knew where things were. Possibly they still missed the spacious and lower decibel lounge of the "Marine" for annual reunions.

The Friday night slide show was enlivened by a very informal quiz yet the photography was still as sharp and crisp as ever. A few comments were heard that slides showing older and by-gone members in more "juvenile plumage", had, like real time, flashed all too quickly across the screen thus denying recognition.

The three papers presented on Saturday extended no further south than the Moray Firth and in this area explored in some detail what threats to wildlife had been encountered over the years; how these had been tackled and what were perceived as future dangers. From this the oil industry emerged more as a responsible citizen than the villain of the piece. Perhaps there was a degree of cosy insularity about this. Much of the media "rabbiting" about Braer was inconclusive but the ominous and very real spectre of Exxon Valdes remains just beyond the horizon.

People pressure was rightly seen as an ever increasing threat. In olden times men "went down to the sea in ships" ; now they go in every fiendish device - jet skis, sail boards, power boats, scuba-rigs, etc. to the detriment of wildlife.

Outings on Saturday afternoon were more formally organised with Mini Buses provided. One group had good Capercaillie viewing. For me the highlight was seeing about thirty Kittiwakes in urban Inverness. Shouldn't they be pelagic?

The Annual Dinner was a jovial affair with good food and drink being enjoyed. Later at the Ceilidh we were entertained by a "Twitching Song" which almost promoted this much maligned pastime to being a respectable part of the Agenda.

Sunday morning saw us treated to real "hands on" type ornithology with close ups of Ptarmigan plumage; a fascinating detective hunt for phantom Merlins with sheep bones and heather shaws as forensic evidence. The eradication of rats from Ailsa Craig was in fact a report on an important conservation achievement rather than an ornithological talk.

The final contribution was a very complex and ambitious audio-video presentation by Bobby Smith. In our era of Hi-Fi and Nicam Stereo this was refreshing new ground for Conference and much admired.

More new ventures next year? At the end of a very satisfactory weekend we look forward in pleasant anticipation.

Campbell McLellan

Kittiewake The highlight for one member attending the SOC Conference at Aviemore
Don Smith

The Waxwings are back again

Waxwings have once again been arriving in Scotland and Eastern England this autumn.

This latest invasion appears to be following a similar pattern to 1990 with the first birds arriving in October in flocks containing approx 20% adults. In 1991 birds arrived in November with only 4% adults.

At the time of writing (10th November 1993) there was a flock of 30 Waxwings in Aberdeen city centre which included a bird colour ringed there in 1990. It had been ringed as a juvenile male on 29/11/90 near Aberdeen city centre and was seen in Hemlington, Middlesborough on 19 and 20/2/91 and in Guisborough, Cleveland on 10/3/91. He is now a real stonker of an adult male with a large crest, prominent waxy tips and hooked tips to his primary feathers.

Look out for Waxwings again this winter.
S. Brown

I would be grateful if people could check any Waxwings they see for colour-rings and report them to me. Please note number and order of colour-rings and which legs they are on.

Age of ringed birds would also be useful. Adults (usually) have a prominent pale hook round the tip of each primary feather. These interrupt the pale line which can be seen running down the primary wing feathers of juveniles when they are at rest.

All sightings will be gratefully received and acknowledged with ringing details and any subsequent sightings.

Raymond Duncan, 86 Broadfold Drive Bridge of Don, Aberdeen AB23 8PP

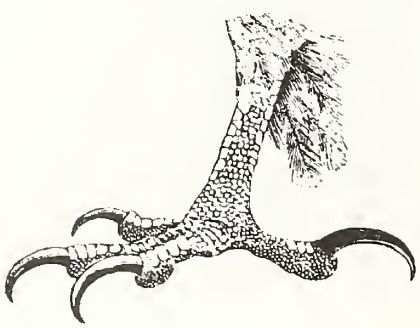
Booted Warbler which turned up in Newtonhill, Grampian in 1993
Malcolm Watson.

Red Kite - taking a dead fish from the sea

In November 1993 I witnessed what I believe to be unusual behaviour for a Red Kite. Driving beside a sea wall east of Avoch, on the Black Isle, I noticed a Red Kite 'hanging' in the air some ten feet above the sea (it was flood tide and at this point the water would have been lapping against the sea wall). I was able to slow the car on a clear road and was just opposite the bird when it dropped below the wall - to rise seconds later clutching a dead fish with both talons. The fish was I estimate about eight inches long. The kite then rose above the car and was lost to view.

I have witnessed such behaviour by Black Kites on several occasions but never with this species. Was this just a one-off opportunist act or a rarely observed piece of behaviour?

Mike Strickland



SOC Raffle First Prize

The annual conference at Aviemore ran very smoothly this year, with all the problems of last year now ironed out. The talks were of a high standard and the birdwatching good. However, it is the social gatherings that make the conference. As an added bonus, I was quite happy to accept first prize in the raffle - a weekend for two in sunny St Andrews.

After an initial debate as to whom I should take, I felt it in my best interest to take along the wee-woman. Eleanor has a way of making one feel that not to do so would result in several broken bones.

The following weekend would have been ideal since there was an Isabelline Shrike on the doorstep, but alas we succumbed to temptation and took a wee trip to sunny Dorset where there just happened to be a Red-flanked Bluetail. The next weekend we did take up Brian and Jen Downing's offer of the weekend at their retreat in quaint little St Andrews. I can certainly well recommend their warm hospitality and good cooking to anyone wishing to book a weekend here (phone 0334 72663). In addition to the superb food and comfort of our own apartment, we were able to squeeze in a few birds, such as the Booted Warbler at Newtonhill, a flock of Waxwings in Aberdeen and Surf Scoter in St Andrews Bay.

So this year's conference has even better memories and hopefully next year will be equally rewarding.

Bruce Forrester.

Birdwatchers start to twitch???

Is confusion, excitement and anxiety about to spread through Britain's twitchers? Without doing anything, many of them may be about to add a tick or, more likely, lose one, from their life lists.

Henri Ouellet at the Canadian Museum of Nature has just suggested that the Grey-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus* should be split into Grey-cheeked Thrush and Bicknell's Thrush *C. bicknelli* (Wilson Bulletin 105: 545-572). Both forms have occurred in Britain.

The two new species are almost indistinguishable in the field. Most birders, having struggled to find one of these skulking rarities, may not now be able to tell which they have seen and will not be able to tick it on their lists. Other who saw birds that were identified in the hand, may be able to tick both species.

The decision to adopt the split has not yet been made in this country. Dr Alan Knox, Chairman of the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee said "This may be ten times worse than the confusion after the splitting of the 'Lesser Golden Plovers'. At least most of those had been racially identified in the field. We are looking at this possible split at the moment and have started to gather some of the skins of birds that have died in this country for examination." In the meantime.....

Footnote: The 'Lesser Golden Plover' split was adopted by the BOURC in 1986 but has still not been accepted by the AOU.

Roof nesting Great Black-backed Gulls in Aberdeen

During a local census of urban breeding gulls in Aberdeen in 1993 two pairs of roof nesting Great Black-backed Gulls *Larus marinus* were discovered. Both nests were in Aberdeen's dockland, approximately 3/4 kilometre apart amongst 40 and 16 pairs of breeding Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus*.

One nest was on the flat apex of a warehouse roof against the surrounding parapet 15 metres above the ground. The other was situated in the junction of an upward sloping vent outlet protruding from a steep asbestos roof just below the apex 25 metres above the ground.

Both pairs successfully fledged young. At both sites Herring Gulls were nesting within a few metres of each other but none nesting closer than 10 metres to the Great Black-backs. It appears the Herring Gulls preferred to keep their distance when breeding in the proximity of the larger gulls. One building has since been demolished.

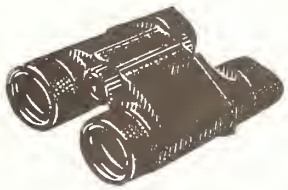
A pair of Great-Black-backed Gulls held territory in the same area in the late 1970's *(Marren, P. 1982. A Natural History of Aberdeen)* but a survey of roof nesting gulls in the area in 1981 failed to find any. The only previous published records of Great Black-backed Gulls nesting on buildings which we know of both refer to Cornwall where a single pair nested in 1970 (*Cramp, S. 1971. British Birds 64:476/487)* and seven pairs bred in 1974 (*Monaghan, P. & Coulson, J.C. 1977. Bird Study 24: 89/104).*

Raymond Duncan

Great Black-backed Gulls have taken to nesting on roofs in Aberdeen.

Charles Frank

THE NATURAL CHOICE IN SCOTLAND FOR



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Barnacle Geese - are they a problem?

Barnacle geese from breeding populations in Greenland and Spitsbergen winter in Scotland between October and April. The total wintering population of Barnacle Geese in Scotland has increased to around 40,000 birds after a few good breeding seasons in the arctic, and all these birds are given legal protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act in Britain. The bulk of these visitors go to Islay, the Outer Hebrides, Caerlaverock and the Solway. However some of the Greenland birds spend the winter on the islands in the south of Orkney and the Pentland Firth.

Following a case on the Solway the question of damage done by Barnacle Geese poses a few problems to say the least. Daniel Quinn, a Scottish tenant farmer was cleared of killing two Barnacle Geese despite evidence given by the landlords, The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT). Mr Quinn argued that he was entitled to shoot Barnacle Geese - a protected species - because a provision in the Wildlife and Countryside Act allows unlicensed shooting where severe damage to crops can be proved. At the trial the sheriff ruled for an acquittal after an official from the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department (SOAFD) said that damage had been done to land on the merse near the Solway Firth where Mr Quinn farms. Interestingly enough the merse is semi-natural grassland - not improved enclosed pasture. Dr Myrfyn Owen Director of the WWT said "he was dismayed to hear of this acquittal". The future looks grim for so-called protected species.

Barnacle Geese feeding on the merse at Caerlaverock, along with a single Red-Breasted Goose S.M.D. Alexander.

However some of the Greenland birds spend the winter on the islands in the south of Orkney and the Pentland Firth. On average only about 1000 of these birds winter in Orkney and this year the count is less than 700 birds, but they are still causing problems with local farmers. This is not helped by the delay by the government agencies in giving money to these Orkney farmers to enable them to cope with the grass-eating geese. Although the Barnacle Goose is much smaller than either Greylag or Pink-feet which are widespread in Scotland, all three relish a meal of fresh grass on improved pastures to help them survive against the cold.

The national conservation agency, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), has used goose-linked management payments to help farmers who suffer from excessive feeding by Barnacles on Islay and some other places in Scotland. However, in a speech recently by the SNH chief executive, Roger Croft, it appears that the SNH are now questioning the continued expansion of these protective schemes.

Barnacle Goose.

Andrew Dowell.

Meanwhile, farmers at South Walls, on the south-east end of Hoy, are getting more and more edgy about the damage being caused by the geese. Some farmers, worried about loss of grazing for sheep and cattle, have applied to SOAFD for licences to shoot these otherwise protected birds. The Orkney branch of the National Farmers' Union of Scotland (NFU) has sent a questionnaire to all farmers on South Walls asking for information on loss of income due to Barnacle Geese. Unfortunately this could result in people thinking of these birds as damaging pests, and therefore applying for a licence to shoot them. This could result in a major setback for wildlife conservation in general.

At the moment, farmers are faced with the ridiculous situation of one agency having a policy to pay for goose protection, which it seems reluctant to implement, while another can readily dish out licences to kill the same geese. The government needs to get its act together and make funds available to help farmers who are affected by the geese. This could save these rare birds and be a boon for farmers.

Barn Owls - in Livingston?

The centre of Livingston isn't the first place you would expect to find breeding Barn Owls, especially in November. But , as most people reading this probably know, Livingston did have them. And, I'm happy to say, they seem to have successfully raised all four young.

This report is a case study highlighting the problems, and benefits, of a rare and novel bird turning up in a densely populated area. It will finish with recommendations for anyone finding themselves in the same situation.

The breeding owls were discovered by a member of the West Lothian Bird Club, walking home from work late one evening. The nest site was alongside a fairly busy road and footpath, and opposite an office block. There are abundant hunting grounds nearby. In this situation, after sundown, the owls are quite obvious, especially when street-lighting illuminates the whole area!

According to the BTO, this is the latest ever recorded breeding of Barn Owls in Scotland, which made our situation difficult on three counts: people love record-breakers; people love rare birds; people love owls.

Barn Owl carrying prey to a nest site.
Don Smith.

Even though the information was treated with care, the news leaked with a rapidity that defied belief. It was only a matter of days before crowds of people were gathered outside the bird's nest.

Don't misunderstand me at this point; a situation like this can do wonders for the promotion of bird conservation. The problem was that people were standing in the open, only a matter of yards from the nest! There are two potential worries with this. Firstly, that it will draw attention from less benevolent parties to the exact location of a rare bird's nest. Secondly, of course, **it so obviously disturbs the owls!!** As I'm sure you all know, wilfully disturbing a Barn Owl or any bird at the nest contravenes the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It is illegal, for obvious reasons.

Another potential worry was the arrival of the "twitchers". I use the term with disaffection as it so often brings to mind someone prepared to put a tick before the well-being of the bird, despite birdwatching guidelines, etc. A derisory statement? Well, when one onlooker was asked how he came to find out about the owls, he replied that ....(well-known Lothian birdwatcher and active member of SOC) had told him. Not much wrong with that, right? Well, he had his car parked in an adjacent lane, aimed at the nest site, with his full-beam headlights on.....

Coming home from work one evening I passed a car on fire (vandals), and continued home where I planned to call the police. On passing the owl's nest I saw two people standing in the open, less than 10m from the birds. I turned round and met a couple of the West Lothian Bird Club (WLBC), about 50m from the nest. They told me that one of them had asked the couple if they would mind moving away from the nest. They had replied that they had no intention of moving. I went home, called the police about the car, and asked if they would mind meeting me at the site, whilst they were there, to talk to the couple. With the policeman there, I explained to the couple the sensitivity of the situation, that it was great that they were so interested in the owls, but would they mind moving away to avoid disturbing the birds, not least because it's illegal. The woman turned to me and sneered "we're just standing here; it wasn't until Countryside Rangers and Policemen turned up that the birds got disturbed", and then she walked away in disgust.

There are three types of birdwatcher. One who realises that birds like this are sensitive, and acts accordingly. Another who realises that they are sensitive but disturbs them anyway. And a third, like this woman, bless her, who really has no idea. In retrospect, it was likely that we would meet all three here, and we did: we just weren't prepared for it.

It was about the same time that driving past the site during the day, I saw a tractor in the grassy area underneath the nest. Fortunately, it was lunchtime and the driver was asleep in the cab. He had gone into the area to cut all the rank grass, but had only managed to do a small strip before dinner hour beckoned. It wasn't too much trouble asking him to save doing the rest of the area, while we contacted his supervisor. It seems so obvious now, but here was another threat that we hadn't thought of (who cuts grass in November?). In this case the authority charged with the management of such areas was more than happy to oblige; others should be equally so. Private landowners may have economic reasons for being less agreeable, but it would be an extremely complicated blend of circumstances for the birds' interests not to be safeguarded.

The big problem with all this is that the time when the bird is a guaranteed sighting (at the nest) is the one time when you really don't want it disturbed; it's a catch 22 situation. So, what can we learn from it all? It's obviously difficult to give recommendations as each situation will

differ, even with the same species, but this is what I would do given the benefit of this experience:

don't **hope** that the bird will be all right.
assess the situation: is the bird likely to be disturbed? (We have other high-profile schedule 1 birds breeding in Livingston, but they are relatively well-hidden).

If so:
contact the landowner, especially councils, stressing "secrecy", and enquire about any planned work/management in the area. Make sure they understand the implications of the law.
Keep a regular, low-key, check on the birds. One of our WLBC members found one of the fledgling Barn Owls flapping about in the middle of the road one night!
Tell as few people as possible; the more people you tell, the more trouble you invite.
A Countryside Ranger or SNH regional representative if often an appropriate person to contact in the first instance as they usually have good relations with local landowners/councils.
Don't inform the hotline (!) or bird recorders until the birds have left the nest: there's no rush to record the event. **The birds are more important than the tick!**

It's unlikely that this is the first time Barn Owls have bred in this area, and hopefully not the last: there is plenty of the right habitat here. Hopefully, the youngsters will find more secluded places to breed than their parents!

Stan Phillips
Countryside Ranger, Livingston.
January 1994.

Project Barn Owl - Pilot Year

A joint BTO / Hawk and Owl Trust project on Barn Owls will commence this year with a pilot survey followed by a three year survey commencing in 1995.

The survey will be of 'sample areas' consisting of 5 x 5km squares, and they are aiming to survey around 100 squares in the pilot year. Due to limited time available for organising the project which should see the start of fieldwork in January only a small proportion of members will have been notified. However, they are hoping to achieve regional coordination for the full survey as this will require around 1,000 squares being surveyed each year. It is expected that this will be largely organised through BTO Regional Representatives and The Hawk and Owl Trust's Conservation Network Advisors. It is also hoped that many members of the SOC will also be active in this project.

Why not take part in the Barn Owl Project??
Brian Turner.

Each fieldworker will receive a 'fieldwork pack'.

Why your help is needed

Barn Owl numbers in Britain have been falling throughout this century. A Hawk and Owl Trust survey between 1982-85 recorded a decline of 70% in England and Wales since the 1930s. The new BTO Breeding Birds Atlas shows that Barn Owl has disappeared from 35% of the range in which it was recorded during the first Atlas in the 1970s. Loss of habitat and nest sites, urbanisation and road expansion, and changes in agricultural practice are all human induced pressures which have been implicated in the Barn Owl's decline. However, the factors involved are complex and the relative impact of each is difficult to assess. Therefore, despite its public appeal, it cannot be assumed that the conservation of this species is assured. Vigilance through long-term monitoring is essential.

To assess Barn Owl numbers across the country in a manner which will be properly repeatable in the future, volunteer fieldworkers are needed to undertake systematic searches of selected areas. **Can you help??**

If you would like to find out moreabout the Survey write in the first instance to **Trudie Dockerty, Project Officer, Project Barn Owls, at the BTO, The Nunnery, Nunnery Place, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU. Tel. 0842 750050.**

Eilean nan Ron - 1993

This is my second visit to Eilean nan Ron, a small island off the north coast of Scotland, the previous being reported in SBN 30 - June 1993. We landed on the corresponding day to last year (July 23rd) with very high expectations for this year after some excellent results last year, as we had the advantage of prior knowledge of the island and a larger team to work with. The total area of the island is approximately 1 square mile and it lies less than a mile off the Tongue peninsula. The island is now uninhabited, and is of interest historically as well as ornithologically. The highest point is a mere 76 metres.

Three of us arrived a day earlier than the other eight that would form our team, and it became obvious that events were starting to repeat themselves from 1992, as the first bird ringed was a juvenile Meadow Pipit. At this time we were considering the odds of a wash-out like the first attempts to ring Storm Petrels last year. During an afternoon stroll around the island we managed to find and ring 4 Great Skua, 2 Herring Gull and 1 Great Black-backed Gull chicks. Upon our return to camp we met a French couple who had been taken to the island to see Storm Petrels, and we invited them to join us later that evening to see this elusive species at close quarters. On what was a very blustery night we managed to ring a total of 36 which I believe pleased our guests.

With the arrival of the rest of our team the 24th was a very successful day with a wide variety of birds being ringed including: 6 Shag, 4 Fulmar, 4 Great Skua, while the Twite roost yielded a Robin, 7 Meadow Pipit, 4 Twite and a northern Willow Warbler. For the Petrels the group divided into two so that two sites could be netted. This paid dividends as 397 Storm Petrels were ringed and a Leach's Petrel narrowly missed getting trapped; as with last year many birds had been previously ringed elsewhere and, continuing the similarities with 1992, another Norwegian ringed bird was netted.

The 25th was almost as productive with a trip to the north of the island providing 11 more Fulmar chicks and a ringed adult; again a few passerines were ringed including 4 Meadow Pipit nestlings and a Whinchat. The Storm Petrel colonies again provided a large number of birds with 244 being ringed.

The 26th was our final full day on the island and again was very successful with another 10 Fulmar, 4 Meadow Pipit and 2 Twite, before another 378 Storm Petrel were ringed during the night to push their total over the 1000 mark.

Interesting sightings include Merlin (23rd), Short Eared Owl (24th), Puffins, Razorbills and the increase in the number of Black Guillemot and Eider in comparison to last year's sightings.

Sightings on Eilean nan Ron between 23rd/27th July 1993

Fulmar: A substantial breeding population of over 300 pairs
Storm Petrel: The most numerous species on the island with a large colony on the north coast holding up to 10,000 pairs of which over 1,000 were caught during 4 nights.
Leach's Petrel: Singles seen near the Storm Petrel colony on two occasions.
Gannet: Seen daily out at sea.
Shag: Another species that breeds in large numbers producing huge rafts of juvenile birds on the sea making accurate population estimates difficult, but it is thought to be over 150 pairs.
Cormorant: Occasional birds noted.
Eider: This species has increased since 1992, with a maximum of 30 birds seen on the 24th.
Kestrel: A pair nested in the Landing Bay area and produced two chicks.
Merlin: One observed on 23rd.
Peregrine: Three seen daily giving some excellent views.
Oystercatcher: Maximum of 8 being seen together.
Dunlin: Passage migrant heard calling at night.
Snipe: The most common wader species with a maximum of 12.
Redshank: Another passage wader that was heard at night but never observed.
Great Skua: 10/15 pairs from which we ringed 9 juveniles, although we found more that had been ringed earlier.
Common Gull: Large numbers seen daily out to sea.
Lesser Black-backed Gull: Mainly noted out at sea, but may also breed on small islets on the west side of the island.
Great Black-backed Gull: A population of less than 20 pairs breeds on the south side of the island.
Herring Gull: Breeds in the area adjacent to the Great Black-backs with roughly the same numbers.
Kittiwakes: Large numbers breed on the inaccessible north east cliffs.
Sandwich Tern: One pair noted on boat trip to and from island.
Arctic Tern: 3 seen on trip across to island.
Razorbill: Small parties of not more than 10 birds seen daily.
Black Guillemot: The largest concentration of this breeding bird was a raft of 35+.
Puffin: 3 birds flying west was the only sighting.
Rock Dove: 8 together seen on 26th.
Short-eared Owl: A single bird roosted on the 24th and one was seen flying towards the mainland early on the 25th.
Skylark: Population of between 4-5 pairs.
Swallow: No sign of nesting but one pair seen daily.
Meadow Pipit: The commonest passerine with more than 50 breeding pairs.
Rock Pipit: A recently fledged brood of young was the only proof of breeding.

Wren *David Mitchell*

Wren: A small population was noted with at least one bird being seen daily.
Robin: One juvenile bird was ringed on the 24th.
Whinchat: One juvenile bird was ringed on the 25th.
Wheatear: One probable nest site found was the only suggestion of breeding although up to 20 birds were seen around.
Willow Warbler: One adult was ringed on the 24th
Hooded Crow: Four birds seen daily.
Linnet: Occasional birds noted with the Twite flock.
Twite: 10-20 birds seen daily with 7 being ringed during the trip.

Ringing Totals for the period 23rd-27th July 1993.
Storm Petrel - 1055, Fulmar - 25, Meadow Pipit - 19, Great Skua - 9, Shag - 8, Twite - 7, Great Black-backs - 5, Herring Gull - 4, Robin - 1, Willow Warbler - 1, Whinchat - 1, making a total of 1135.

Derek Gruar

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay – Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist – almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodand garden of Colonsay House.
Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Demi-pension from £48.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £120.00 weekly.

On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke – £16 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

THE HOTEL, ISLE OF COLONSAY, ARGYLL
(Kevin and Christa Byrne)
Telephone: Colonsay (09512) 316 – open all year

N.B. Booklet @ £3.50 inv. p&p describes the island's birds – 66pp plus 8pp colour photos.

REVIEWS

The Birds of North America: Set 1. *A. Poole, P. Stettenheim & F. Gill eds. 1992. American Ornithologists' Union & Academy of Natural Sciences at Philadelphia. £31.50 only from NHBS (sole agent in UK).*

This ambitious project, covering 720 species of North American birds, is intended to be completed within the next ten years. Starting with the Barn Owl T alba, individual authors will produce separate profiles of around 20 pages, building to a finished work of 18 volumes, each containing 40 species. Each volume can be stored in a slipcase. The individually produced species profiles will not emerge in taxonomic sequence.

My chance to review the first eight species descriptions left me with mixed feelings. The individual authors must be congratulated for offering the reader such a wealth of information on each species, and the presentation is both crisp and easy to read. Particularly valuable are the annual cycle diagrams and the sections on conservation and management, these latter sections providing a wide range of recommendations/warnings for the future of each species. It's easy to gain the impression, after a few visits to any country, that some species can be regularly observed without too much difficulty. The profiles point to some disturbing population trends already obvious with Piping Plover C melodus, but also noticeable in King Rail R elegans and even Northern Mockingbird M polyglottos, as well as offering advice on future conservation measures.

However, a project such as this must, inevitably, draw comparisons with BWP and it does seem expensive (compare the total UK purchase price of c£3150 quoted by the British distributors with the US price of around £1270 and it might just be time to buy another of those vacuum cleaners!). Just one colour photo, of dubious value, on the first page of each profile is all that is offered for each species where a full set of colour plates would certainly have been more useful. The line drawings themselves are often more decorative than informative. Produced on a matt, acid-free paper, the whole thing does not exude the quality of BWP and I wonder how the separate profiles will stand the ravages of constant use.

As a resource this work, when completed, will prove invaluable to a wide range of birders and researchers alike. The considerable list of references quoted at the end of each profile reveals just how comprehensive each author's treatment has been. However, weighing up the overall value of such a work against its somewhat high price, it's probably going to find itself a place in libraries rather that on birders' bookshelves. A pity really, considering the amount of interest displayed in American birds on this side of the Atlantic!.

Angus Hogg

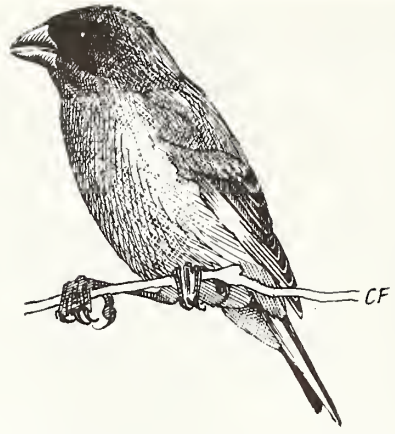
Heron *David Mitchell*

Herons *by Mick Marquiss. Colin Baxter Photography Ltd. 1993 48pp £7.95 ISBN 0 948661 29 1*

This is an excellent book written by an expert on Herons. Working in Scotland for many years with the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, Mick has gained an insight into the private life of the Heron which he readily shares to anyone reading this book. It not only gives detailed information in a very readable manner to anybody interested in this magnificent bird. It is also extremely well illustrated with numerous colour photographs and a superb illustration by Keith Brockie.

Mick explains the dangers of being a Heron and being top of the aquatic food chain and also the conflicts that arise when they clash with man's interests in fishing. However, despite a number of setbacks the Heron still remains a well known and admired species by anybody who has sat and watched a Heron stalking prey in the shallows. The book also includes many touches of humour both about the bird and working with it.

Sylvia Laing



Greenfinch *Crispin Fisher*

Finches & Sparrows: An Identification Guide *by Peter Clement, Alan Harris and John Davies. Christopher Helm, A. & C. Black. London £29.99*

It is now 10 years since Harrison's "Seabirds" was first published and most members of the SOC will be familiar with this series of guides published by Christopher Helm. "Finches & Sparrows" by Peter Clement and illustrated by Alan Harris and John Davies is the most recent.

It covers 290 species of "true" finches and sparrows which helps keep the volume to a manageable size. While some might have wished for the inclusion of the buntings (and hence the New World Sparrows) for completeness this would have resulted in a huge tome covering 680 species.

In common with other books in the series there are three short preliminary chapters on how to use the guide, with general notes on the finches and sparrows. These are followed by 73 wonderful colour plates showing 950 portraits of each species including variations with age and sex.

The bulk of the book comprises the species texts which follow the format of the previous guides. Each text varies between one and four pages; those of European and North American species are longer reflecting the greater wealth of ornithological knowledge in these regions.

This guide is not one which is crucial to the study of birds in Scotland as it takes a cautious view on Loxia scotica our putative endemic finch. It will prove a popular guide for those interested in cagebirds (and also those who find escapes!). It is also an excellent guide for those Scottish birders who seek exotic places while on holiday.

David C Jardine

SOC NOTICES

Continued success of 200 Club

The SOC 200 Club was started in June 1989 and will have completed five very successful years by the end of May. During this time just over £8000 has been donated by its members, of which half will have been given out in prizes and half used for the internal refurbishment of 21 Regent Terrace. In addition to work carried out previously (see SBN 29), this last twelve months has seen the completion of painting in the ground floor and basement. Those who use the Club premises will have seen the improvements and, as Council has already noted, have expressed their gratitude to some 170 SOC members for their practical help to the Club.

Council has endorsed its continued support of the 200 Club, and hopes it will achieve its aim of attracting 200 SOC members, who must be over 18 years old. With another 30 members the monthly/annual prizes can be increased, and more will be available for Club refurbishment.

Renewal notices to members who do not pay by bank standing order will be posted in the next few weeks, and it is hoped that they will renew their membership. If you would like to join for 1994/5 (starting on 1 June) please send a cheque for £12 to me, payable to "SOC 200 Club", or write and ask for a bankers order form. All cheques will be acknowledged. You can of course take out more that one unit of membership; some have two - or even three!

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe,
Rosebank, Gattonside,
Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL
Tel Melrose 2176.

200 Club winners

Winners for the fourth quarter of 1993 were:

October - 1st £30 - F.D. Hamilton, Longniddry; 2nd £20 - R.Seath, Aberdour; 3rd £10 - M.J. Everett, Huntingdon.

November - 1st £100 - K.J.Lee, Aberdeen; 2nd £75 - A.C.Bastable, Dundee; 3rd £50 - M.J. Everett, Huntingdon; 4th £30 - J.F. Young, Dumfriesshire; 5th £20 - Mrs J.B.Lammie, Wigtownshire; 6th £10 - Miss S.M. McCulloch, Edinburgh.

December - 1st £30 - Miss R.M. Glen, Edinburgh, 2nd £20 - Mrs M.L. Livingston, Edinburgh; 3rd £10 - J.K.R. Melrose, Perthshire.

Lothian Branch AGM

The AGM for the Lothian Branch has been changed from April 12th to April 5th and will take place at the usual venue of Napier College, Craiglockhart, Colinton Road, Edinburgh at 19.30

Field Guides for Eastern Europe

SOC are promoting a project to provide field guides for Russian birdwatchers, as they are expensive and not generally available there. Arising from a recent discussion with Dr Ryabitsev, a Russian ornithologist, it has been suggested that SOC members may wish to help by donating any European or British field guides that they no longer require. The purpose is to encourage birdwatching by schools, local groups and individuals in Russia. Dr Ryabitsev would provide a translation of the list of birds and distribute any books sent to him. Geoffrey Harper (son of Bill Harper SOC Librarian) has offered to assist by providing a translation of a standard letter and any personal message which would be attached to each book. As a result some links with SOC might be established. If you would like to participate, or would like further information, please contact **Roger Brewer (031 399 5414) or your branch Secretary.**

A similar request has been received from the Lithuanian Ornithological Society (LOD) whose Secretary, Mantas Zurba recently visited 21 Regent Terrace. LOD would be grateful for optical equipment, cassettes or bird books, which should be sent to **Mantas Zurba, Mildos 31 - 3, Vilnius 2055, Lithuania.** The choice is yours - Mother Russia or the Baltic States - but any donations would certainly be gratefully received.

SOC PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETION WINNERS

1st Mary MacIntyre, Fife. Sooty Shearwater.
2nd Eric Middleton,Borders. Common Sandpiper
3rd equal David Hassell, Middlesex. Whimbrel
3rd equal Eric Middleton, Borders. Dipper.

Thanks

Thanks are once again due to a number of volunteers who willingly give up their time to come into 21 Regent Terrace. The people who helped pack the envelopes for the December mailing of Scottish Bird News and Scottish Birds are Rosemary Davidson, Margaret Abel, Betty & Bob Smith, Bill & Hetty Harper and last but not least Anne-Marie Smout. Our grateful thanks goes to them all.

Trip to Texel

Stirling Branch are planning a trip to Holland from 14th / 21st May. The base will be on the Southern most of The Friesian Islands, Texel. Additional visits will be made to Naardermeer and Flevoland; a good week's birdwatching is anticipated. Places are still available, but be quick or you may not get. If you are interested contact : - **Ian Wilson, 100 Causewayhead Road, Stirling FK9 5HJ. Tel 0786 473877.**

SOC Prize-word

30 correct entries received and the winner drawn at the SOC Annual Conference at Aviemore was **P Stokes, 27 Liberty Road, Glenfield, Leicester.**

The correct solution was:- Across - 6 turnstone, 10 phalarope, 11 ratless, 12 wren, 13 Ruthven, 15 reeve, 16 moorhen, 17 sparrow, 19 spur, 21 dotterel, 22 roller, 24 rough, 27 ashore, 28 diver, 29 skylark, 32 gos, 34 ross, 35 ouzel, 37 teal, 38 poll, 40 air, 41 stints, 42 tick, 43 Prato, 45 erect, 46 loons, 48 tit, 50 adult, 51 duck, 52 Stellers.
Down - 1 sparrow, 2 lanner falcon, 3 harrier, 4&6 sooty tern, 5 reeves, 7 shearwater, 8 oyster, 9 eagles owl, 14 ortolans, 20 pipit, 22 rose-coloured, 23 eleonora's, 25 owl, 26 gyrfalcon, 30 kites, 31 azure, 33 stonechat, 36 lesser, 37 titmouse, 39 little, 44 pied, 47 SOC, 49 owl.

Wing-tagged Red Kites released in Scotland

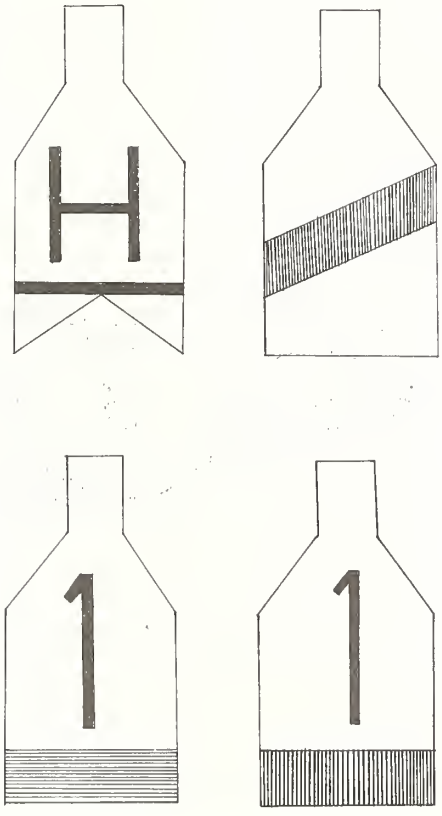
All Red Kites released in Scotland as part of the joint JNCC/RSPB reintroduction project have been fitted with wing tags. The tags are not necessarily the same on each wing (examples are shown in the accompanying sketches).

We would like to know of any sighting of Red Kites, whether or not tags are seen. Please notify **Richard Evans, RSPB, North Scotland Office, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW**, so that sightings can be followed up and individual birds identified, or phone **0463 715000.**

1989-1991 (Top left): Tag colours orange, mid-blue or yellow, depending on year, both wings the same. Number or letter identifies the individual bird.

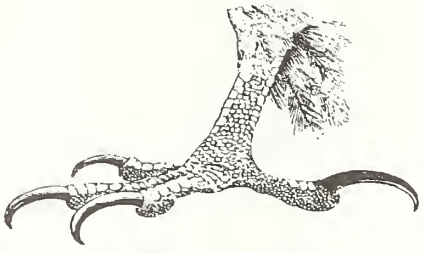
1992 on Type A (Top right): Main colour indicates year of release, colour and type of contrasting mark (not necessarily diagonal bar) identifies individual bird. Both wings the same.

1992 on Type B (bottom left and right): Main colour (same both wings) indicates year, letter or number identifies individual bird, as do contrasting coloured bars at broad end of tags. These are in unique left/right combinations for each bird.



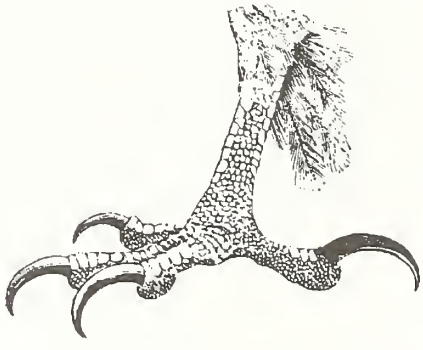
Grey Geese

The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust have encouraged Ringing Groups across Scotland to colour mark grey geese to improve knowledge of movements throughout the winter. Marked birds will be colour ringed and dyed yellow on tail, or tail and forewing. Reports of any sightings will be greatly appreciated. Write to **Ian Stenhouse at 2 Old Farmhouse, Nonikiln, Alness IV17 0XZ. Tel 0349 882001.** Any information sent to the Highland Ringing Group or Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust will be forwarded to Ian and vice versa. All sightings will be acknowledged.



Wing-tagged Hen Harriers

Marked birds are carrying a coloured tag on each wing. Although the colour on each wing may be different a single letter or number is repeated on each tag. Details of any sightings no matter how incomplete should be sent to **Brian Etheridge, RSPB, Highland Office, Etive House, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW Tel 0463 715000** as soon as possible.



ERRATUM:

We apologise most sincerely to Mary MacIntyre for the error made in the caption for the winning photograph in the SOC Photographic competition which was judged at the SOC Annual Conference at Aviemore in October. This photograph was published in our winter 1993 issue of Scottish Birds Vol 17.2. as a Manx Shearwater when it should have read Sooty Shearwater.

Colour-ringed Stonechats

Over the past two years I have been colour-ringing mainly pullus Stonechat at coastal and inland sites near Aberdeen. So far approximately 100 birds have been marked and it is intended to continue the study for a further 3 years.
Indications are that young birds move considerable distances and I would therefore be grateful for any sightings of such birds anywhere in Scotland. Note should be made of the combination and which leg bears the metal and which the colour rings. All sightings will be acknowledged. **Andy Thorpe, 15 Albyn Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 1YP.**

Look out for Goosanders!

On 21st August 1993 the Tay Ringing Group on behalf of Mick Marquiss of the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology managed to catch, ring and wing tag 8 Goosanders on the Eden Estuary L.N.R.
This is the second year a catch has been attempted and in 1992, 22 Goosanders were tagged with a blue tag and dark blue lettering. In 1993 the tag is red with white lettering. Results so far from 1992 would indicate that these birds which moult on the Eden Estuary actually come from the south and west with reports from Dumfries & Galloway, the Peak District and even Wales. If anyone has sightings of any of these birds please get in touch with **Les Hatton, North East Fife Ranger Services, Craigtoun Country Park, St Andrews, Fife KY16 8NX Tel 0334 72151.** All sightings will be acknowledged.

Colour ringed Ring Ouzels

David Arthur is now into the second year of his study looking at Ring Ouzels in Glen Esk, Angus. During the 1993 breeding season a number of birds were individually marked with colour rings; if you happen to see any Ring Ouzels with colour rings please contact **David Arthur, 12 Dundee Street, Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7PG. Tel 0241 53356** All sightings will be acknowledged.

THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

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Raptor round up 1993

This is a summary of the results of some of the work of the Scottish Raptor Study Groups in 1993. Raptor Study Groups, like television, appear to be a good Scottish idea now being taken up by the rest of the world. With the Cumbrian and Northern Ireland groups now well established (and attending the most recent Scottish RSG conference) the pattern is being adopted in other part of northern England and also, most recently, in the New Forest.

This is the third year in succession that I find myself reporting the adverse effects of "unusually bad" spring weather and as I write we are again enjoying a cold wet spring in 1994. Perhaps it is time to start regarding these sort of conditions as the norm! Most workers commented on the bad weather with regard to most species and only Osprey was said to have done well despite of it.

This was the first year of a two-year Merlin survey which has encouraged an already established trend in most groups towards greater coverage of the species.

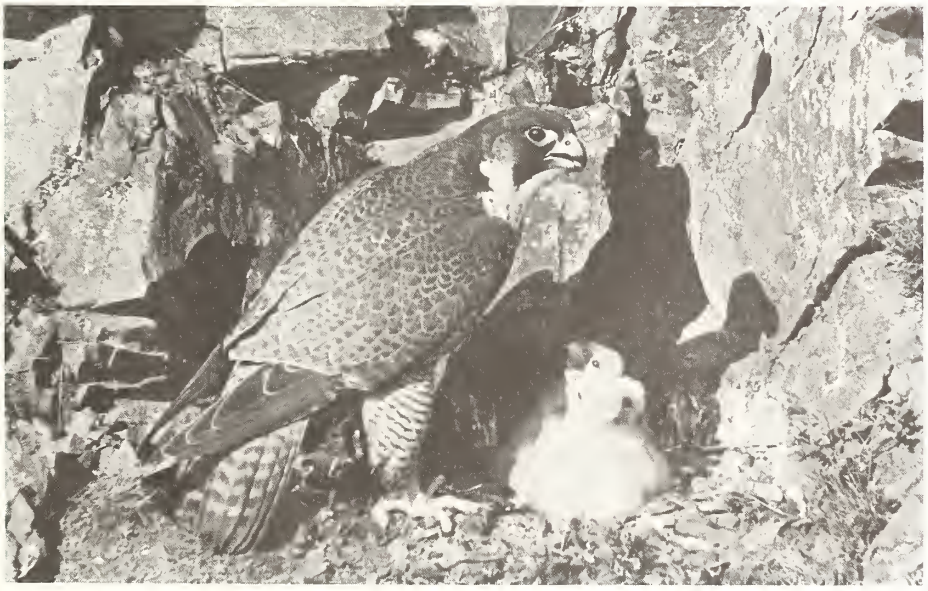
This was also the first year with apparently no Osprey nest robberies. It would be extraordinary if we have seen the end of Osprey egging, an activity thought to have taken a measurable toll on the population's expansion. There is no real evidence of any reduction in the general activities of egg collectors and Osprey workers are not being complacent about the threat.

The high profile capture of a Peregrine nest robber on Central Television's *Cook Report* and his subsequent fine of £700 made south west Scotland's raptor workers feel a lot better. More importantly, it highlighted the extent and organisation of the illegal trade in raptors.

Seven Scottish Red Kite chicks fledged with one of these now understood to have joined the Welsh population! This isn't quite what the programme was intended to achieve but the outlook for this species in Scotland is such that hopefully we can afford to be generous with one of our Scottish birds.

The Buzzard also provides us with a success story having re-colonised many part of eastern Scotland where it was until recently a great rarity. This includes many low ground areas with birds now present in Lothian and on the east coast of Grampian. Young were successfully reared within Edinburgh city boundary.

Not a very successful season for Peregrines *Jim Young*



Peregrine

North East Scotland RSG (Jon Hardy)

Of 60 territory holding birds, the majority of which laid eggs, only 19 eventually fledged a total of 38 chicks. Most failures were at egg stage with periods of appalling weather in spring and early summer the main cause and human interference playing a relatively minor role. This was markedly worse than 1992 which itself was a very poor year. The outcome at five nests is unknown but unlikely to change the overall picture.

Central RSG (Patrick Stirling-Aird)

With a mean of exactly two chicks per successful nest and exactly one per pair present, Central at least achieved statistical neatness even if productivity was not outstanding. In fact Central bettered the performance of many Scottish areas in a

generally bad year in terms of site occupancy and productivity.

Tayside RSG (Keith Brockie, Ron Lawie, Patrick Stirling-Aird)

The heavy snowfall of 13th and 14th May drastically reduced breeding success. Six successful pairs in the west of the region had only one chick apiece and not a single bird fledged from 14 of the 33 occupied Angus sites. Although the weather was by far the greatest influence there is still ample evidence of persecution and workers reported a marked decline in fortunes on one particular estate. 1.58 birds fledged per successful nest as against 1.72 for 1992.

Argyll RSG (Roger Broad)

Although sites were not systematically monitored throughout Argyll 17 sites that were checked revealed 16 pairs with 14 laying eggs. Ten of these pairs were successful and produced at least 18 chicks. This sample suggests a moderately successful season by west coast standards. In December two different individuals on Islay were recorded with Little Auk as prey.

Highland RSG (Colin Crooke)

Peregrine

	NE	Cent	Tay	D&G	S.St	B&L	Hghl	Ork	Shet
Sites checked	86	32	90			47	36	33	24
Sites birds present	60	26	79	71	28	47	30	18	3
Sites laid			33+	45	17	39	17	18	2
Sites hatched						22	11	5+	1
Sites fledged	19	13	31	24	8	22	8	5+	1
Tot. young fledged	38	26	49+	44	17	46	15	9+	2

The demands of the Merlin survey reduced time available for Peregrine work in this large region. Despite this lower coverage the 36 sites monitored indicated a generally poor year with mean fledged brood size per attempting pair down by 34% on the 1992 figure. Only 0.88 chicks per laying pair were fledged. Badenoch and Strathspey achieved two per pair and Lochaber none at all. A total of only 15 chicks were raised in contrast to the 51 known from 1992.

Western Isles (Lewis & Harris RSG, Alison Rothwell, Uists RSG, Paul Boyer)

Site occupancy in Lewis & Harris was very poor with one chick fledged from the one and only successful site found. The Uists had a good year by Western Isles standards exceeding 1992 productivity with 13 birds from five successful nests. One site that had never got young off before produced three chicks.

South Strathclyde RSG (Dick Roxburgh)

With 17 young fledged (a mean of 2.13 young per successful nest) South Strathclyde improved its productivity on its 1992 performance (11 young/1.57). However with 60% of pairs present apparently failing to breed this population is not really achieving its potential. Mean productivity per pair present was only 0.61 chicks per nest. Nest robbery was responsible for 37% of known nest failures and continues to be a major problem in the area.

Dumfries & Galloway RSG (Chris Rollie, Dick Roxburgh)

This Region continues to share its northern neighbour's problems with human interference at nests. The 44 young fledged represent a mean of 1.83 per successful nest but only 0.62 per pair present, the lowest level ever recorded. As with South Strathclyde a significant number of failures (24%) were due to robbery, a statistic not much softened by the successful prosecution of one such criminal.

Border & Lothian RSG (George Carse)

Despite the loss of 12 nests to human interference and a further 13 natural failures this area still remains very productive with 46 chicks fledged in 1993 from 22 successful nests in 47 occupied territories. Seven new nests were found.

Orkney (Eric Meek)

Orkney Peregrines continue to do poorly compared with mainland Scotland although they perform consistently better than the Shetland birds. At least nine young fledged from 18 pairs present at 33 monitored sites. The difficulties of assessing the output from sites on the Islands' massive sea cliffs mean that the number of successful pairs may well be an underestimate. The outcome of five pairs that laid eggs this remains unknown.

Shetland (Pete Ellis)

With the virtual extinction of Shetland Peregrines a very real possibility (no successful breeding for 1991 or 1992) it is gratifying to report two young fledged in 1993, particularly when two pairs laid eggs as against none at all the previous year. However, site occupancy was down from five pairs in 1992 to only two in 1993 (in 24 monitored sites) and this success may well be only a "blip" in the bird's continuing decline.

Golden Eagle

North East Scotland RSG (Robert Rae)

The quality of the habitat in most of this area is such that it ought to be one of the most productive in Scotland for this species. In 1993 the bad weather took its toll, however. A rate of only 1.34 chicks per successful pair and 0.85 per pair laying was achieved. This is certainly better than the rest of the country but well below the area's potential and worse even than 1992's poor season. Some consolation is gained from the higher numbers of pairs laying so that while productivity was down on 1992 the actual number of chicks fledged, at 11, was higher.

Central RSG (Roger Broad, Dave Dick, Don MacCaskill)

The Region produced one chick per successful pair, just as in 1992 and a fairly typical productivity rate for the area. Only three pairs achieved this from seven occupied territories, again the same as for 1992. This low productivity may merely reflect the repeated bad weather patterns from year to year or may indicate something more fundamentally wrong with the habitat.

Golden Eagle	Cent	Tay	Arg	Hghl	NE
Sites checked	9	33	51	72	17
Sites birds present	7	28	38		16
Sites laid		19	35		13
Sites hatched		11	27		10
Sites fledged	3	10	24	30	8
Tot. young fledged	3	12+	28	39	11

Tayside RSG (Keith Brockie, Dave Dick, Ron Lawie)

A slight overall improvement on 1992, despite the weather. A reduction in productivity in the east of the region was balanced by a marked improvement in the west to give an unusually even productivity of 1.2 chicks per successful nest (0./63 per breeding attempt) in each part.

Argyll RSG (Roger Broad, Mike Gregory)

Productivity, which is never high in Argyll despite the density of the population in some areas was neverththeless considerably better than in 1992. Whereas then only 0.30 chicks were produced per attempting pair this figure rose to 0.8 for 1993. Actual numbers fledged were up from 19 to 28 even though far fewer sites were checked (51 against 94 for 1992, a full survey year).

Highland RSG (Jeff Watson)

After the high coverage in 1992, a full survey year, less effort was possible with Golden Eagles in 1993, especially in north west Sutherland and Wester Ross where poor summer weather made site visits difficult. Comparisons with earlier years are thus unsafe. The overall picture seems to be of better than average success in the eastern glens and poorer than average performance in the west.

Western Isles (Lewis & Harris RSG, Alison Rothwell, Uists RSG, Paul Boyer)

Whereas most of Scotland seems to have experienced worse eagle productivity in 1993 than the already poor 1992 season this trend was defied in the outer isles. Although coverage was lower than in the 1992 survey year the 28 occupied territories monitored produced 15 chicks from 13 successful pairs (only 13 chicks from 11 successful pairs in 1992 from a much fuller sample of the population), Lewis and Harris and the Uists each had one pair of twins and a Uist pair produced young for the first time in at least ten years.

Golden Eagle *M. Ashley*

Merlin

North East Scotland RSG (Graham Rebecca)

Below average productivity (1.6 young fledged per pair present, 2.97 per successful pair) was nevertheless better than many parts of Scotland. This possibly reflects the fact that much of the north east had "only" sleet and rain in mid May when many areas had heavy snow. Site occupancy was low for a third year running at 52%. A total of at least 86 young were recorded fledging.

Tayside RSG (Ron Downing, Wendy Mattlingley)

If 1992 was a poor season then 1993 must go down as very poor. Site occupancy was down with the increase in coverage revealing only 49 sites occupied out of 116 checked. Mean productivity amongst successful pairs was 2.35 chicks per nest (2.45 in 1992) with Angus (2.9) bettering Perthshire (1.8).

Argyll RSG (Roger Broad)

The requirements of the two year survey entailed greater effort with this species and resulted in systematic coverage of several 10km squares and some other selected areas. The information from this work suggests expansion by the species in some areas (e.g. the Cowal) although in other parts this could simply reflect increased effort by observers. Throughout Argyll birds were found at 16 sites and 9 breeding attempts confirmed. These produced seven successful pairs fledging at least 17 chicks. The productivity rate was generally lower than is normally expected in Argyll due to the poor weather.

Highland RSG (Bob Swann)

Despite improved coverage in 1993 fewer pairs were discovered with eggs than in 1992. Productivity, however, was very slightly improved and a mean of 3.4 chicks left each successful nest. Southerly parts of the region were more productive than the north.

Western Isles (Lewis & Harris RSG, Alison Rothwell, Uists RSG, Paul Boyer)

Although 1992's excellent fledging rate of 3.33 chicks per successful pair was not matched in 1993 this may be due only to the lack of data available for six of the ten occupied Uist sites achieved a mean of 3.5 birds each and the ten successful Lewis and Harris pairs managed a mean of 2.5 birds apiece.

South Strathclyde RSG (Dick Roxburgh)

The weather appeared the main culprit in this very poor season. Only 2.58 birds fledged per successful pair and 1.35 per pair present (3.0 and 1.8 in 1992). Despite the generally poor season one pair did manage to fledge five young. Overall numbers were much greater than in 1992. This was not due to any increase in the population but to the great efforts of John Adair and Craig Shuttleworth who were employed by Forest Enterprise to find forest edge Merlins. By walking a massive 925 kilometres of forest edges they confirmed 13 new sites with 7 other possible sites.

Merlin

	NE	Tay	D&G	S.St	B&L	Hghl	Ork	Shet
Sites checked	86	116					51	62
Sites birds present	60	49	18	23	24+		19	26
Sites laid					22	47	12	23
Sites hatched					13	42	12	
Sites fledged	19	29	9	12	12	39	8	14
Tot. young fledged	38	70+	19	31	35	133	19-20	55

Dumfries & Galloway RSG (Chris Rollie)

A similar number of pairs were located in the Region to that found in 1992. Productivity was down, however, again due to the bad weather. Only 2.11 young were raised per productive nest (3.5 in 1992) with 1.06 per pair present. (1.4).

Osprey *S. Brown*

Osprey

No. pairs known	No. pairs laying	No. clutches hatched	No. successful broods	Tot. no. young fledged
88	78	59	56	111

Borders & Lothian RSG (Alan Heavisides)

Overall productivity from four different upland areas was only 2.92 per successful pair and 1.46 per pair present (3.81 and 2.10 in 1992). The heavy snow in mid May took its toll with an incubating female in the Moorfoots found dead on the nest, apparently from hypothermia. Although overall performance was well below average the Moorfoot population showed higher than usual site occupancy with a record ten nests at the egg stage.

Orkney (Eric Meek)

Although 1993 was a poorer than average year Orkney continues to defy the national trend by producing a reasonable Merlin crop when much of the rest of Scotland is struggling. Many young, however, died in the rain before fledging. 30 chicks were known to have hatched but only 19 or 20 fledged from the eight successful nests. Losses occurred even at the later stages with 26 chicks still alive at ringing age.

Shetland (Pete Ellis)

Although site occupancy is not high, Shetland Merlins continue to be productive, in marked contrast to the local Peregrines. In 1993 55 young were raised giving 3.93 chicks per successful pair, 2.12 per pair present, an improvement on the previous year.

Osprey

(Roy Dennis, Colin Crooke, Keith Duncan, Keith Brockie, Bradley Yule, Roger Broad)

A steady increase continues in the Scottish Osprey population. This is despite the periods of bad weather that characterised the spring and early summer. The main effect of this was to reduce brood sizes, particularly in the north of the bird's range where there were fewer broods of three than in 1992. A total of 111 young fledged from known nests, only a ten per cent increase on the previous year whereas the number of pairs attempting had gone up by 28%. Nineteen new sites were identified, although at least four of these had been in use before 1993. Five ringed birds were recovered or controlled in various parts of the UK and one 1992 chick was found dead at Vendée in France. A 1991 bird was identified in April 1993 in Spain at the same location where it had been seen in the autumn of its first year. A1990 ringed bird spent its third winter at the same location in Gambia.

Tayside RSG (Keith Brockie, Bradley Yule)

The above includes 26 occupied Tayside sites where 20 pairs laid eggs. 17 of these hatched and 16 of them produced a total of 37 chicks. This was a good season with the birds seeming little affected by the weather. It was marred only by a chick which drowned when its nest collapsed.

Tayside RSG have indicated that they are now happy to publish their Osprey figures as a separate item in the round-up. If other groups wish to do this their data can be included in future round-ups.

Hen Harrier

Tayside RSG (Bruce Anderson, Ron Downing)

In Perthshire 53 young fledged from 17 successful nests, three of which were re-lays. This is less than in 1992 (89 from 24 nests). Although poor weather can not have made things any easier, persecution is still thought to be responsible for much of these bird's lack of breeding success. No young were reported fledged from Angus although two sites were found occupied and a number of other birds located, a similar pattern to that in 1992.

Highland RSG (Brian Etheridge)

1993 proved to be a disappointing breeding season. Deliberate human destruction remains the single most important factor in breeding success. The expansion of Grouse moor management into areas where the birds were previously unmolested in south east Sutherland, Easter Ross and eastern Inverness-shire is worrying. At least 75 birds fledged from 24 nests. Eggs were recorded in 50 nests initially, so that only 1.5 birds fledged per pair laying (3.1 per successful pair).

Uists RSG (Paul Boyer)

Birds were present at nine sites. Of the three nests located two succeeded in getting off a total of seven young.

South Strathclyde RSG (Ricky Gladwell, Chris Rollie)

Only three Hen Harrier nests were successful in South Strathclyde out of 18 discovered in 23 occupied territories. Nine birds fledged. 60% of nest failures were attributed to human persecution. Persecution levels remain much the same as for 1992 but natural failures were much greater than for that year when 37 birds fledged from ten nests.

Dumfries & Galloway RSG (Ricky Gladwell, Chris Rollie)

Dumfries & Galloway did markedly better than South Strathclyde producing 31 young from eight successful nests of the 14 found in 16 occupied territories. This is the same productivity per successful pair as 1992 (3.57) with a slight increase in birds produced per occupied territory (1.94 against 1.67). Three nest failures (50%) were attributed to persecution. Persecution notwithstanding this must be considered a fairly successful season.

Orkney (Eric Meek)

Following a poor year in 1992, 1993 was the worst season on record for Orkney Hen Harriers. Of the 30 nests located 20 failed at egg stage, seven failed after hatching and only three nests fledged a mere four young (1.3 young per successful nest, 0.13 per occupied nest). Although the weather undoubtedly played a part there may also perhaps be something more fundamentally wrong with the birds' food supply.

Buzzard

Highland RSG (Malcolm Harvey)

Information from four Highland areas was obtained with 54 pairs fully monitored. 41 of these were successful in raising a mean of two chicks each. It appeared that proportionally fewer attempting pairs were successful compared with 1992 with successful pairs' productivity also reduced. Pairs in areas with high rabbit numbers did appear to be somewhat cushioned from the effects of the bad weather.

Tayside RSG (Bradley Yule)

Tayside Group's efforts to monitor this species' re-colonisation of the eastern part of the Region revealed successful breeding in Fife (at least five young fledged) and Dundee district (at least two). The outcome from three occupied sites in Angus is unknown but 37 pairs were known to have laid in Perthshire where the species has long been well-established and these produced at least 23 young.

Borders & Lothian RSG (George Smith)

This species' re-colonisation of Lothian is one of 1993'2 great success stories. Ten pairs were known to be successful in raising 22 chicks between them. The outcome at a further nine nests was unknown. It would appear, on the basis of the performance of the known successful pairs, that the population can sustain itself and continue its gradual expansion.

Kestrel

Ayrshire (Gordon Riddle)

1993 was a year of extremes for Gordon's long-term study. A sequence of bad, good, extremely bad and extremely good weather had a marked effect. Pairs either failed completely or were very successful with no intermediate results. The overall failure rate of 54% was by far the highest ever recorded. All failures were before or during incubation. After hatching brood survival was an unprecedented 100%. Birds that managed to hold out through the bad weather were able to take great advantage of the following warm spell and the fact this this was a very good vole year. A mean of 4.4 chicks was produced per successful pair with a mean of two chicks per pair attempting. Clutches included six of six eggs and one of seven.

Highland RSG (Mick Canham)

A request for more Kestrel data from Highland RSG workers allowed 39 sites to be monitored. These had 19 clutches leading to 17 broods, all of them successful, with a mean successful brood size of 4.5 chicks giving 77 birds fledged. This was a reasonable breeding season. The 100% chick survival rate reflects that in Gordon Riddle's study area.

Keith Morton.

Buzzard at nest *Jim Young*

The 1994 seabird wreck in the Moray Firth

Dead seabirds were first observed coming ashore in small numbers on 13th February. By the time the first organised counts took place on 18th February it was evident that a major non-oiling incident involving Guillemots, Shags and other seabirds was occurring. This article give details of the number of birds involved, where they were found, and where they were from and speculates on what caused the wreck.

Fig. 1 gives details of which stretches of coast were covered by counters during the wreck period. Most of the counts were part of the RSPB organised survey which took place on 26/27th February. Unfortunately that weekend coincided with gale force winds, blizzards and an exceptionally high tide which was observed to scour many beaches clean leading to an under-estimation of the number of birds involved at some sites. In a few areas, particularly Moray, East Ross and S.E. Sutherland more regular counts were made over a longer period and these give more precise information on the number of birds involved and when they came ashore. At a few sites where there was the possibility of double counting only the maximum total for individual species was used.

In total, in the 133.4km of beaches checked at least once, 3000 seabirds (excluding *Larus* gulls) were reported (table 1). Three species dominated: Guillemot (15.0 per km of beach checked at least once), Shag (6.3 per km) and Razorbill (0.7 per km). There were, however, considerable regional variations (table 2). The south coast from Nairn - Portgordon and the inner firths from Nigg Ferry - Avoch - Nairn consistently held fairly low numbers. The more exposed SE facing coasts received large numbers of dead Guillemots, which were particularly concentrated in some of the small bays in Caithness. Dead Shags were most concentrated in East Ross especially around Tarbat Ness and also around Portgower in Sutherland.

In East Ross regular counts were made at almost weekly intervals throughout the wreck period covering large stretches of coast from Tarbat Ness to Shandwick. To reduce the effect of double counting all corpses were thrown well above the high tide line on each count. All corpses in reasonable condition were aged as adults or immatures according to plumage characteristics. Of 450 Shags that were aged 55% were in full adult plumage and

Guillemots and Razorbills - some of the species afected during the winter wrecks along the east coast.

M Hayes

25% of 460 Guillemots were in full summer plumage. Table 3 give details of the number of Shags and Guillemots counted in each weekly period. These figures suggest that there was an almost continual arrival of birds on the beaches from mid February to mid March with the peak for Shags being reached between 4th/10th March (after the RSPB count). In both species the percentage of birds in immature plumage was greatest in the second fortnight (table 3).

Table 1. Number of seabirds found dead Moray Firth

	Caithness	*Sutherland*	*East Ross*	*Inner Firths*	*Moray*	*Total*
Fulmar	2	1	14	1	-	18
Cormorant	-	4	1	1	4	10
Shag	12	228	505	6	84	835
Kittiwake	1	3	26	5	-	35
Little Auk	-	3	1	1	1	6
Razorbill	7	32	46	3	3	91
Guillemot	434	597	764	66	136	1997
Puffin	3	3	1	-	1	8
Km. of beach	5.25	27	33.1	15.5	52.55	133.4

Table 2. Number of corpses per km of beach checked Moray Firth

	Caithness	*Sutherland*	*East Ross*	*Inner Firths*	*Moray*	*Total*
Shag	2.3	8.4	15.3	0.4	1.6	6.3
Razorbill	1.3	1.2	1.4	0.2	0.1	0.7
Guillemot	82.7	22.1	23.1	4.3	2.6	15.0

ORIGINS

40 ringed Shags and 3 Guillemots were reported. Most of the Shags were adult birds and had originated from colonies in the Firth of Forth (table 4) with smaller numbers from the Farne Islands and Sule Skerry. Surprisingly, despite the large number of Shags ringed locally in Caithness and East Ross only one of these birds was found dead. Two of the Guillemots were ringed locally, but again, surprisingly, most of the Guillemots were unringed despite the very large number that have been ringed locally in recent years.

LIVE BIRDS

The start of the wreck coincided with a major movement of seabirds into the inner Firths. On 13th February 1936 Cormorants, 580 Shags, 5000 Razorbills and 210 Guillemots were counted in the Inverness Firth, whilst on 14th February 6000 Guillemots were counted in the Beauly Firth. Auk numbers remained high throughout February and the number of Shags continued to increase with 7743 being counted flying in past Chanonry Point on the morning of 20th February. 3500 were still present in the area on 2nd April.

CAUSES

This wreck was the biggest yet recorded in the Moray Firth. During the period 1983-86 three wrecks occurred with 3.5 Guillemots per km being recorded in February 1983, 7.5 per km in February 985 and 10.5 per km in February 1986. The Shag wreck is totally unprecedented as were the numbers of live Shags in the inner firth. During the wrecks of 1985 and 1986 less than 10% of the Guillemots involved were in full summer plumage whereas in 1994 25% were. Large numbers of adult Shags were also involved in the 1994 wreck. In both species the percentage of immatures increased in the latter half of the wreck. Perhaps by this time the more experienced adults had located alternative feeding areas.

The wreck coincided, as have all past ones, with a prolonged period of easterly winds which lasted from mid-February to early March, although fresh corpses continued to come ashore, albeit in small numbers till at least 27th March, well after the winds had moved out of the east. Previous studies have shown that mortality rates of both Auks and Shags tend to be highest in late winter, possible due to a shortage of natural food supply. When this period also coincides with gale force easterly winds, feeding conditions become very difficult for seabirds along much of the

Shags also did very badly *Bobby Smith*

Table 3. Number and age of Shags and Guillemots on East Ross beaches in weekly periods throughout the wreck.

	18-24 Feb	*25 Feb-3 Mar*	*4-10Mar*	*11-17 Mar*
Beach checked (km)	13.5	14.1	9.8	13
No. Shags	169	109	127	84
Shags/km	8.7	7.7	12.9	6.5
No. adult Shag	81	55	53	40
No. imm. Shag	43	31	74	44
No. Guillemot	253	181	147	92
Guillemots/km	15.0	12.8	15.0	7.1
No. adult Guillemots	25	43	20	24
No. imm. Guillemots	65	82	126	68

coast of eastern Britain causing birds in a weakened condition to move to more sheltered feeding areas or to die.

Table 4.
Origin and age of ringed Shags

	1-2 years	*adults*
Sule Skerry	1	2
Caithness		1
Isle of May	2	26
Craigleith		5
Farne Islands		3

In this instance it appears that many birds moved north to the Moray Firth where fish were available in reasonable quantities in the inner firths. Birds arriving in a weakened condition would probably have died. Many of the Shags in East Ross had come ashore to roost and died at the roost sites. Four Shags examined by the Inverness Veterinary Centre were all emaciated with empty guts and long term starvation, in some cases linked with pneumonia, appeared to be the most likely cause of death.

Why so few local birds were involved is open to speculation. Perhaps it was these birds, using their local knowledge, that moved into the inner firths early on to exploit the available food supply and so survived.

Willow Warbler in a more usual nesting site. *Wm. Paton*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Colin Crooke of the RSPB Highland Office provided the BBS cards on which much of this article was based. Several members of the Highland SOC branch and Mike Harris provided counts of live birds. However it is to the many people who walked the beaches that my greatest thanks are due and in particular to David Butterfield who made many visits to the East Ross beaches.

Bob Swann.

Willow Warbler nesting in an old Mistle Thrush nest

On 6th June 1993 we were walking through a birch wood near Glen Gairn, Deeside when we located a Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* nest 5m from the ground in a Birch *Betula verrucosa*. This is unusual in itself as a Willow Warbler nest is "normally on the ground, often in a hollow.....occasionally a few feet up in a low bush or ivy, and exceptionally much higher". (Fitter and Richardson, 1968. Nests and Eggs. Collins).

A Willow Warbler nest 5.2m up in a Birch has previously been recorded (Brockie, K. 1982. High Rise Willow Warbler. Scottish Birds Vol. 12 No 6 p193). In that case the nest was a "typical domed structure" in a growth of witches' broom. Unusually the Gairn nest was built inside the old nest of a Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*. It appeared that the lining of the thrush nest had been pulled up to form the dome of the warbler's nest. It was lined with feathers and contained 6 eggs which the female was incubating. There was suitable nesting habitat nearby.

Strangely, we located another Willow Warbler nest only a few metres from the base of the Birch tree. This nest was being lined by a different Willow Warbler.

When we returned on 27th June both nests had been predated.

Judy & Raymond Duncan, 86 Broadfold Drive, Bridge of Don, Aberdeen.
Jim Church and John Massie.

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay – Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist – almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodand garden of Colonsay House.
Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Demi-pension from £48.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £120.00 weekly.

On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke – £16 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

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Buzzard distribution in Glen Roy

Glen Roy, Inverness-shire, is an acclaimed Glen noted primarily for its relict glacial features. My interest was with the interactions between the landscape of the Glen and the inhabitant fauna, in particular the Buzzard *Buteo buteo*.

Five pairs of Buzzards held territories within Glen Roy; four pairs in the lower 5km length of the glen and one pair in the upper 8km. Between 1985 and 1992 I observed the Buzzard's breeding behaviour, in relation to the glen's environment, in at attempt to explain this distribution disparity.

Moorland grasses and heather, with bracken, bog myrtle and sedges, blanketed the steep upper glen hillsides; tree cover was sparse. Significant features of the upper glen were areas of glacial-lake deposits in the valley floor, for these formerly permitted over 100 years of crofting, resulting in slightly improved pasture. Large quantities of rainfall run-off produced boggy conditions on the valley sides and particularly in areas adjacent to the river. The primary land use was sheep and cattle grazing.

In contrast, the more subdued landscape of the lower glen contained a wider variety of habitats, with extensive coverage of deciduous and coniferous woodland, open hillside, croftland and meadows. In addition to sheep and cattle grazing, the land was used for agriculture and forestry.

Although the glen's Buzzards were flexible in terms of nest site locations, they appeared to favour the proximity of trees. It was likely, therefore, that the scarcity of woodland in the upper glen was influential in restricting only one pair of Buzzards to that area. It is probable too that the distribution imbalance was also related to food availability. In the upper glen hunting and breeding were centred around the restricted regions of improved ground, and it is possible that were it not for these areas the Buzzards would not have bred in the upper glen at all, for it would have been as barren as the parts further into the glen where Buzzards did not breed. In the lower glen the diverse range of habitats provided a greater abundance, size and variety of prey items. In particular, the presence of Rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, a highly favoured and energy efficient food item (Brown, L. 1976, *British Birds of Prey* Collins, London) may have been of significance. However, by its very nature, the lower glen also harboured more predators, and egg and chick mortality was, consequently, heavier in this area.

It appeared that the environment, through its influence on the availability of nest sites and prey, was the principle determinant of the distribution of Buzzard pairs in Glen Roy. However, the past and present influences of man in creating the composition and distribution of present day vegetation communities should be borne in mind.

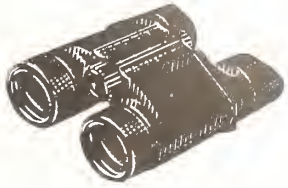
More detailed future work could yield additional information relating to the effects of changing land use, prey availability and competition as factors determining the Buzzard's distribution.

Dominic Sargent,
"Cruach Innse",
Roy Bridge,
Inverness-shire PH314AJ.

Buzzard with three chicks *Wm. Paton*

Charles Frank

THE NATURAL CHOICE IN SCOTLAND FOR



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REVIEWS

New Hamlyn publications

Hamlyn's new series of guides continue to pour from the presses. Their common denomination is value for money in these days of high book prices. This is especially true of the Species Guides : to be able to buy an informative monograph, complete with illustrations and photographs in colour, together with clear, well-produced maps, for under £10 is to say the least unusual. In both the latest volumes, there is a mass of interesting material, ranging from illustrations of owl pellets in 'The Barn Owl' to maps showing the spread of breeding areas this century in 'The Fieldfare'. This series is well complemented by the Bird Behaviour Guides, the latest of which is that on wildfowl : the fact that its authors are Malcolm Ogilvie and Bruce Pearson is surely recommendation enough. Hard cover and more expensive than the Species series, it is nevertheless by no means overpriced.

Finally, the Young Ornithologists' guides, at under £7, are designed both to be within a young ornithologist's budget and to offer a well-written introduction to various aspects of ornithology. Clear and concise, they avoid the trap of "talking down" to their young readers; while essentially simple and containing elementary material, they do not fight shy of terms such as "altitudinal migration". Any - or all! - of the following are to be recommended;

The Barn Owl *by C. Shawyer. Hamlyn. 128pp. £9.99. ISBN 0 600 57949 2*
The Fieldfare *by D. Norman. Hamlyn. 127pp. £9.99. ISBN 0 600 57961 1*
Wildfowl *by M. Ogilvie & B. Pearson. Hamlyn. 160pp. £14.99. ISBN 0 600 57973 5*
Migrants & Migration *by P. Holden and M. Langman. Hamlyn. 48pp. £6.99. ISBN 0 600 57964 6*
Bird Identification & Fieldcraft *by I. Nethercoat & M. Langman. 48pp. £6.99. ISBN 0 600 57963 8*

The Snow Bunting *by D. Nethersole-Thompson. Peregrine Books 1993. 339pp. £27 from* ***Peregrine Books, 27 Hunger Hills Avenue, Horsforth, Leeds LS18 5JS.*** *ISBN 0 9502068 1 3*

This classic monograph, first published in 1966, has become a rare and expensive item in second-hand catalogues. This new edition will thus be widely welcomed, especially as it includes additional material in the shape of an article by the author, reprinted from 'Scottish Birds', which updated the picture to 1976, and a further chapter by four distinguished present-day ornithologists bringing the story right up to date. Speculation on the effects of climatic change on the Snow Bunting's fortunes is especially fascinating.

Other books received

Where to Watch Birds in Ireland; Clive Hutchinson. £10.99; ISBN 0-7136-3827-3.

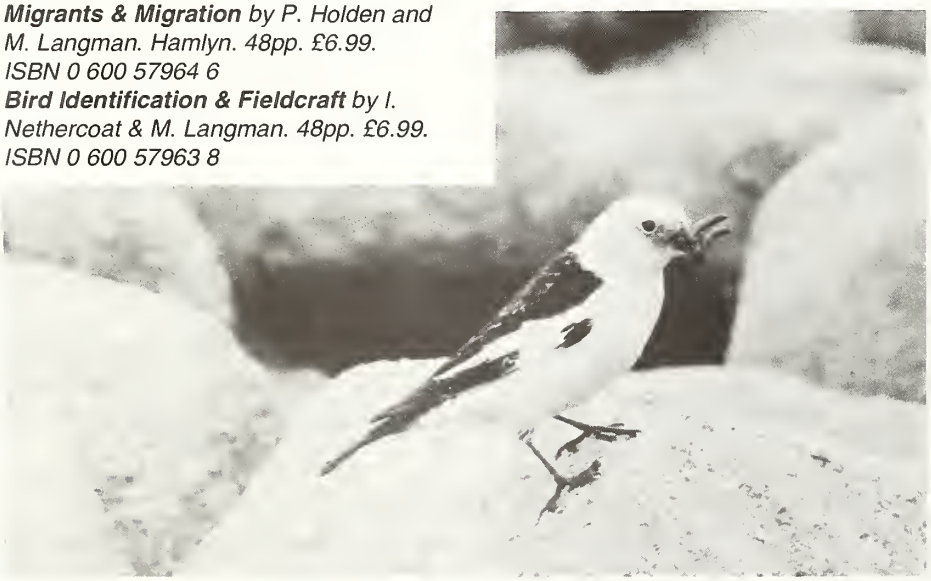
A Field guide to the Waterbirds of Asia; £21.95 only from St. Ann's Books, Great Malvern. ISBN 4-7700-1740-5.

Field Guide to the Birds of Australia; Simpson & Day. £17.99; ISBN 0-7136-3930-X.

The Birds of Singapore; Briffett & Supari. £12.50; ISBN 0 19 588606 2.

Where to watch birds in Southern Spain; Ernest Garcia & Andrew Paterson. £12.99; ISBN 0-7136-3859-1.

Cock Snow Bunting bringing leather jackets to feed his chicks. *Alex Tewnion*



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"Threats to Seabirds"

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Deafened but not defeated!!.

The Lothian branch outing on 13th March to Loch of Kinnordy and the Angus Glens.

A blown exhaust and a dubious weather forecast made us wonder whether it was wise to set off. We decided to risk it, with an alternative itinerary if necessary, so nine SOC members and two YOC members climbed into the minibus and set off north. Nothing fell off the bus and the Forth Road Bridge was not closed to high-sided vehicles (how high is high?) so we made it to our first stop. A pause at Vane Farm and a chat with the warden pointed us to our first target - a white-phase Snow Goose which had been seen with the Pinkfeet for some time. Finding it was no problem but holding 'scopes steady enough for good views in the howling gale was more difficult. Eventually everyone got a good look and so we returned to the planned route.

A rather slow and very noisy couple of hours later we arrived at Kinnordy, with nice views of a flock of Brambling on the way. We spread out between the hides and had lunch whilst searching for wildfowl amongst hundreds of Black-headed Gulls. A nice little assortment; no large numbers but the list included Gadwall, Shoveler, Goosander and three male Ruddy Duucks which had just returned after the winter, Great Crested and Little Grebes were seen but, of course, we were just too early for the Black-necked Grebes!

Snow could be seen on the tops and we had the odd shower but the roads were clear so we continued with our planned trip up Glen Clova. It didn't take us long to find the first of several groups of Buzzards, giving excellent views as they soared above the valley.

Arriving at the Glen Doll car park at the end of the road just as a shower stopped, we all leapt out and had a good scan around the snow-covered tops but without success. A short walk in the somewhat more sheltered forest only added Siskin to the list and with time running out we returned to the car park, still scanning. A bird soaring above the skyline drew our attention and was soon identified as an immature Golden Eagle. At this point we met the SNH warden, who was looking in the other direction and he pointed out a pair of adults, just dots above a high snowfield. Whilst most of us were watching them, the immature reappeared and swooped rapidly across the valley, more or less above our heads. We all got good views of at least one Eagle and then set off back down the valley, pausing for yet more Buzzards (we must have seen almost 20 in all) so we could compare the flight silhouettes of the Eagle and Buzzard.

A flock of Twite rounded off an excellent, if somewhat noisy, day and we returned, tired but happy. Many thanks to Brian for all the driving. The minibus seems a good way of getting about so we intend to use one more often in future. This should make it easier for those of you without transport to join us. Hopefully we should get one with an undamaged exhaust next time!

Paul Speak

SOC NOTICES

Look out for Goosanders!

In August 1993 the Tay Ringing Group on behalf of Mick Marquiss from the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology managed to catch, ring and wing tag 8 Goosanders on the Eden Estuary L.R.N.

This was the second year a catch had been attempted and in 1992, 22 Goosanders were tagged with a blue tag and dark blue lettering. In 1993 the tag was red with white lettering. Results so far would indicate that these birds which moult on the Eden Estuary actually come from the south and west with reports from Dumfries & Galloway, the Peak District and even Wales. If anyone has sightings of any of these birds please get in touch with **Les Hatton, North East Fife Ranger Services, Craigtown Country Park, St Andrews, Fife KY16 8NX Tel 0334 72151.** All sightings will be acknowledged.

Dates for your diary

The winter meetings start again in September and the dates given below are the dates of the September meetings which usually are regarded as Members' Nights.

They are as follows:

15th September - Tayside
19th September - Borders, Clyde and Grampian
20th September - Highland, Lothian, and West Galloway
21st September - Ayr, Caithness, Dumfries and Fife
22nd September - Stewartry and Stirling

The first **Club Night** organised by Lothian Branch and held in the Library at 21 Regent Terrace is **26th October.**

A full list of meetings and winter outings will be sent out with the September mailing

200 Club

The sixth year of the 200 Club started on 1st June and, in April, all existing members who pay by cheque or cash were invited to renew their subscriptions. If you are one of the few who did not, and would like to continue to help the SOC in this positive way, please send me your cheque for £12 now (payable to 'SOC 200 Club"). New members, who must be SOC members and over 18, are very welcome to join; simply send me a cheque or PO for £12 to cover the year from 1st June, and you will immediately be entered for all the monthly draws to May 1995. A very warm 'thank you' to all who did renew.

Winners for the first quarter of 1994 were:-

January - 1st £30 - T.H. McGeorge, Edinburgh; 2nd £20 - Prof. P. Vandome, Edinburgh; 3rd £10 - R.S.Smith, Plymouth.
February - 1st £30 - W.G. Patterson, Gullane; 2nd £25 - Miss M.H. Gibson, Galashiels; 3rd £20 - R. Muir, Aberfeldy; 4th £10 - Miss M.C. Lawrie, Troon.
March - 1st £30 - B. Pirie, Aberdeen; 2nd £20 - Miss M.H. Knox, Edinburgh; 3rd £10 - R.M. Sellers, Gloucestershire.

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL (tel. Melrose (089 682) 2176).

Wing-tagged Red Kites released in Scotland

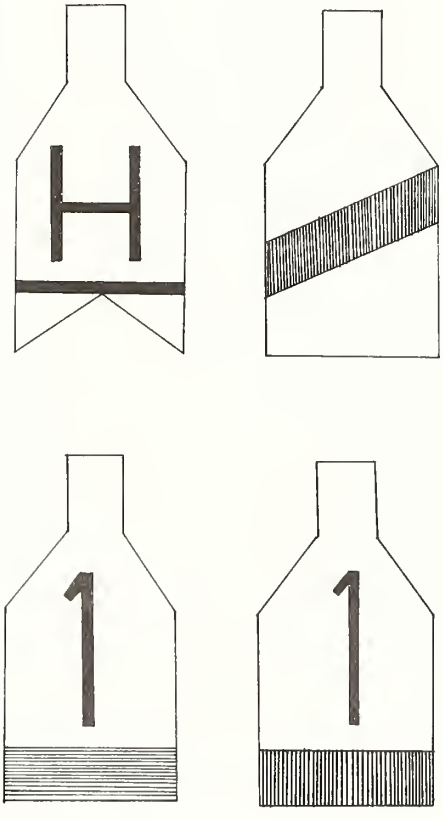
All Red Kites released in Scotland as part of the joint JNCC/RSPB reintroduction project have been fitted with wing tags. The tags are not necessarily the same on each wing (examples are shown in the accompanying sketches).

We would like to know of any sighting of Red Kites, whether or not tags are seen. Please notify **Richard Evans, RSPB, North Scotland Office, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW**, so that sightings can be followed up and individual birds identified, or phone **0463 715000.**

1989-1991 (Top left): Tag colours orange, mid-blue or yellow, depending on year, both wings the same. Number or letter identifies the individual bird.

1992 on Type A (Top right): Main colour indicates year of release, colour and type of contrasting mark (not necessarily diagonal bar) identifies individual bird. Both wings the same.

1992 on Type B (bottom left and right): Main colour (same both wings) indicates year, letter or number identifies individual bird, as do contrasting coloured bars at broad end of tags. These are in unique left/right combinations for each bird.



Colour-ringed Stonechats

Over the past two years I have been colour-ringing mainly pullus Stonechat at coastal and inland sites near Aberdeen. So far approximately 100 birds have been marked and it is intended to continue the study for a further 3 years.

Indications are that young birds move considerable distances and I would therefore by grateful for any sightings of such birds anywhere in Scotland. Note should be made of the combination and which leg bears the metal and which the colour rings. All sightings will be acknowledged. **Andy Thorpe, 15 Albyn Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 1YP.**

Stewartry branch raise funds

Stewartry Branch have been fund-raising for a new projector, and they are pleased to report an excellent start has been made with over £100 being raised by the sale of nest-boxes, a crossword, a quiz and the sale of plants nurtured by the green fingered members of the branch and last but not least donations.

Fair Isle

Awards are made annually from the John Harrison Memorial Fund which is administered by the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust. John Harrison was a young bird-watcher who visited Fair Isle three times, but whose life was tragically cut short. This fund was set up in his memory on the instigation of the late Richard Richardson. Grant are given to help young people with the cost of travel and their stay at the Observatory; they must be between the ages of 15 and 21 when they go to Fair Isle.

Successful applicants are responsible for making their own travel arrangements and booking at the Observatory, where they must stay for a minimum of one week. They are encouraged to visit outside the main migration periods, and to help with the ornithological work of the observatory. Information about the Observatory, and of activities which might be undertaken during their stay, can be obtained direct from the Warden on Fair Isle. Application forms are available from the Honorary Secretary, John Harrison Memorial Fund, c/o 1 Dempster Terrace, St Andrews, Fife KY16 9QQ. They must be returned no later than 31st October, for consideration in mid-December.

Colour ringed Ring Ouzels

David Arthur is now into the second year of his study looking at Ring Ouzels in Glen Esk, Angus. During the 1993 breeding season a number of birds were individually marked with colour rings; if you happen to see any Ring Ouzels with colour rings please contact **David Arthur, 12 Dundee Street, Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7PG Tel 0241 53356.** All sightings will be acknowledged.

Wing-tagged Hen Harriers

Marked birds are carrying a coloured tag on each wing. Although the colour on each wing may be different a single letter or number is repeated on each tag. Details of any sightings no matter how incomplete should be sent to **Brian Etheridge, RSPB, Highland Office, Etive House, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW Tel 0463 715000** as soon as possible.

Lothian Branch outings Summer 1994

19th June; Farne Isles with David Kelly. Minibus will leave St Andrews Square at 9.00am

31st July; Musselburgh with Brian Robertson. Meet at Goose Green (east shore at the mouth) at 10.00am

28th August; Tyninghame with Harry Dott. Meet at Spike Island Car Park (southern shore) at 10.00am

late August/early September. M.V. Gardyloo. Date and leader to be arranged. This is a week day trip and anyone interested in going should contact David Kelly as soon as possible. When the sailing is arranged he will contact members and let them know the final details.

18th September; Hound Point with Bill Prestt. Meet opposite Hawes Inn, South Queensferry at 2.30pm

For further details on any of the above outings please contact **David Kelly on 0875 810827.**

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THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

SEPTEMBER 1994 No. 35
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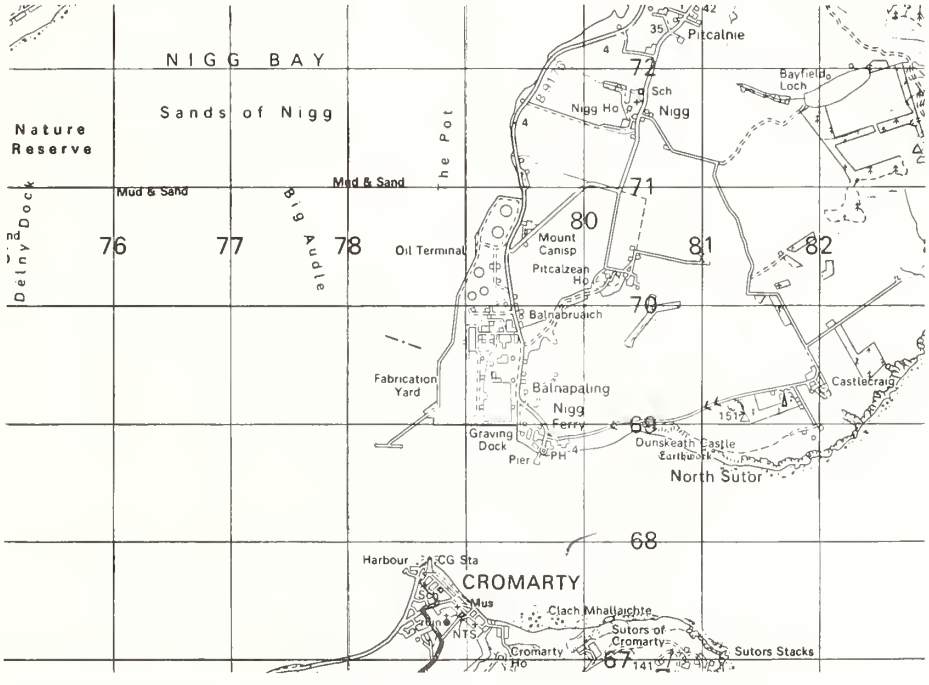
Edited by Sylvia Laing and Michael Murphy

Seabird Monitoring at the BP Oil Terminal, Nigg, Easter Ross.

The oil terminal at Nigg was built in 1979 to store oil from the Beatrice Field in the Moray Firth, prior to collection and onward shipment by oil tankers. The site, which is on land reclaimed from Nigg Bay near the mouth of the Cromarty Firth, is composed of various storage tanks and other oil and gas related equipment. Although some of the bunds around the storage tanks are grassed over most of the ground is covered by bare gravel, which appears to be very attractive to breeding waders, terns and gulls. The entire site is surrounded by a high security fence which results in very low levels of disturbance to the breeding birds. Since 1990 the Highland Ringing Group has undertaken fairly detailed monitoring of the birds nesting at this site.

The seaward edge of the site is composed of large boulders rising to 3m above the surrounding mud flats. On top of these boulders and at the base of the security fence a large colony of Eiders has been established. As Table 1 shows their numbers have increased from 27 nests in 1990 to 63 nests in 1994. Success is high with 90% of all nests hatching chicks.



Map showing the Cromarty Firth and Nigg Bay.

Table 1. Counts of nesting pairs at BP Nigg Oil Terminal

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Eider	27	36	44	56	63
Arctic Tern	63	72	182	213	139
Common Tern	65	115	171	384	341
Great Black-backed Gull	4	27	31	50	85
Common Gull	6	15	10	20	21
Herring Gull	3	3	1	0	4

The terns tend to nest in the gravel areas around the various pipes in the yard. Arctic Terns prefer the barest areas, while Common Terns prefer slightly more vegetated areas. Numbers of both species have risen dramatically over the study period, peaking in 1993 with 364 pairs of Common Tern, 213 pairs of Arctic Tern and 4 pairs of Sandwich Tern (Table 1). Breeding success has been rather variable. In 1991 and 1992 it was good with Common Tern producing 1.2 and 0.9 chicks per pair respectively and Arctic Terns producing 0.65 chicks per pair in both years. In the other years virtually all the Arctic Terns failed to produce young and Commons were producing around 0.3 chicks per pair. The reason for the low success in these years is purely speculative. Poor weather and lack of food may have had

some effect. In some years the adults bring in large numbers of sticklebacks, which the chicks appear unable to swallow. Predation may also be a factor. In 1993 there was a complete failure in parts of the site adjacent to the neighbouring oil platform construction yard. Cats were observed coming from the yard onto the BP site and it was thought that they may have been responsible for the failures. In 1994 in another part of the site there was another total failure. On this occasion security cameras observed Crows to be the culprits. They systematically criss-crossed the bare gravel areas searching for and predating each nest.

Arctic Tern

Stan da Prato

Common Gulls also nest in the bare gravel areas, as do a few pairs of Herring Gulls and in 1994 one pair of Black-headed Gulls (which unfortunately failed at the egg stage). Between the BP site and the neighbouring oil production platform yard is a strip of bare land, entirely fenced off from both sites and used occasionally as a helicopter landing site. It is here that a colony of Great Black-backed Gulls has become established. Numbers have increased from 4 pairs in 1990 to 85 pairs in 1994, making it one of the largest colonies on the Scottish mainland. As the site is fenced in it is easy to count the nests and then catch and ring all the chicks, prior to fledging, in order to assess breeding productivity. This has tended to be very high varying from 1.9 - 2.2 chicks per nesting pair. All the data from this study are sent to the JNCC Seabird Monitoring programme.

The yard is also home to large numbers of breeding Oystercatchers and Ringed Plovers. Numerous Swallows and Pied Wagtails nest in the various buildings. The Pied Wagtails also roost amongst the pipework and in winter the seaward wall of the site provides an undisturbed roost for hundreds of waders. The position of the site next to the rich feeding areas of the inner Moray Firth plus a relative lack of disturbance and a sympathetic workforce have combined to make this industrial complex a safe haven for a wide range of birds. Unfortunately the Beatrice field is getting towards the end of its life. A question mark now hangs over the future of the yard, its workforce and its birdlife. We plan to continue monitoring the site for the foreseeable future and the Highland Ringing Group would like to thank BP Exploration Operation Company Limited for their continuing financial support towards their bird monitoring activities in the Moray Firth.

Bob Swann

The 1994 Seabird Wreck in North-east Scotland

Readers will have been interested in Bob Swann's account in SBN34: 6-8. My own observations in Aberdeenshire may also be useful, especially as they are directly comparable to those after a larger wreck in early 1990 (SBN 19:3).

The first four dead Shags were found at Rattray Head on 20th January, but there were still only four dead birds at Stonehaven and Catterline to the south two days later. By 12th February there were 14 mainly young, newly-dead Guillemots at Nigg Bay, Aberdeen. Wasted and increasingly decayed bodies continued to come ashore all down the coast into March, and the last fresh Guillemot was found on 27th April. Excluding areas where the birds were apparently removed by intruders, I found 123 bodies, including 76 Guillemots, 10 Kittiwakes and Herring Gulls, 8 Shags, 5 Razorbills, four Fulmars and Common Gulls, and individuals of six other species, on roughly 10km of beach, compared to 244 birds in a similar distance in 1990.

It is notable that while the average length of the Guillemot wings was much as in 1990, the mean for 50 apparently immature wings, 198mm (range 190-213mm) was larger than that for 23 apparently adult wings, 196mm (range 194-207), the frequency distribution curve was skewed to the large side, and many of the birds were rather heavily marked, suggesting the presence of a proportion of large northern young birds. While there were also fewer Shags than in 1990, there have been more in some recent years, notably after gales in February 1990, when two ringed immatures came from the Isle of May.

Since the onset of this wreck was accompanied by the usual speculation in the newspapers that it was due to human interference with the marine environment, it should be noted that while the bodies may not have started to come ashore before the onset of east winds in February, the weather had been stormy, and judging by the condition of the bodies the birds must have been in trouble, for some time before this. The may explain why so many appear to have taken refuge from the previous west winds in the Moray Firth, with the result that they were blown ashore when the wind moved to the east.

W R P Bourne

A letter arising from "Barn Owls - in Livingston?"

I fear that readers of Stan Phillips' articles in SBN 33 may be led to believe (intentionally or otherwise) that the 'hotline and bird recorders' were responsible for releasing information about a Barn Owl nest site which then led to some of the incidents he describes. I would like to put the record straight, as this issue has implications not only for myself, as SOC Recorder for Lothian, but also for other recorders and the general issue of recording uncommon or rare breeding birds.

Firstly I feel it necessary to state that, although I was aware of the nest's existence, I made a decision not to visit the site or tell anyone, and also that Birdline Scotland was unaware of the record and therefore equally not responsible for the leak.

The SOC Recorders are responsible for collecting and maintaining an accurate database of all bird species in their region, including the rare and unusual; so above all they must be seen to be totally trustworthy. It should therefore be stressed that any sensitive information sent to SOC Recorders, whether given in confidence or not, will never be put on general release. If the birds are considered to be vulnerable in any way the record will be later published only in general terms (either by area, region or county) - indeed this is how we will deal with this record in the 1993 Lothian Bird Report, even though Mr Phillips' article has now publicised more accurately the nest's whereabouts. Records of rarer species may not be published at all, but will be forwarded in confidence to the U.K. Rare Breeding Birds Panel, a body sponsored by S.N.H., R.S.P.B., B.T.O and "British Birds" magazine.

Whom an observer chooses to tell is obviously up to the individual, but in the case of uncommon breeding birds clearly the fewer people who know the better. If it is decided to inform the SOC Recorder immediately, he is normally in an excellent position (with collective local knowledge built up over 25 years) to assess the importance or suitability of letting relevant bodies know of the occurrence. Knowing of a nest site can also prevent the release of apparently innocent information regarding an isolated sighting of one of the pair nearby and inadvertently attracting attention to a site.

It should also be noted that Birdline Scotland has a strict policy of not broadcasting information about breeding birds, unless it has been specifically sanctioned by a body such as the RSPB.

Ultimately if you want a record like this kept quiet, tell no-one. News has a habit of spreading remarkably quickly. However don't be put off giving the SOC Recorder full details at some stage so that each and every important record can be fully documented. Remember that the most trustworthy people are those whose positions/jobs depend on their reputations!

Ian J Andrews, S.O.C.
Recorder for Lothian Region,
39 Clayknowes Drive,
Musselburgh,
Midlothian EH21 6UW.

Young Barn Owl

Andrew Dowell

Charles Frank

Scotland's Natural Choice for

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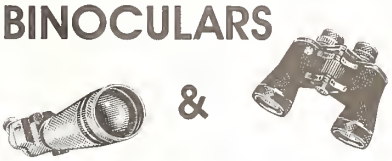

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Red Kite progress update from March 1993.

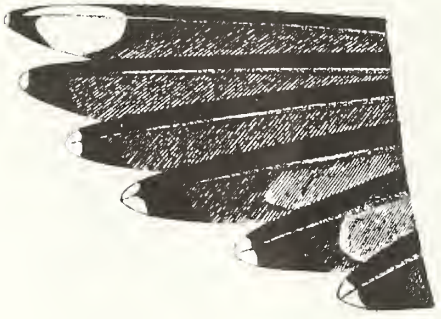
Early March saw the return of good numbers of Red Kites, which were known to have wintered in the south of Scotland and beyond. Among one of the earliest returning birds was kite 3, released in 1989, which has spent every winter since in Perthshire, returning to the Highlands each summer. Two birds which wintered together in Dumfries & Galloway also returned to the Highlands in summer, albeit that one took a rather long route via Caithness, while the other came via Glenlivet. One kite that was eagerly awaited had been monitored during the winter on the Rogerstown estuary, Eire. The initial tracking for this kite's radio frequency in northern Scotland proved to be a disappointment, when a brief chase through a wood on Deeside only produced one of the ITE's Capercaillies. Of the 24 kites released in 1992 at least 20 returned to the north of Scotland during the spring and summer of 1993.

One bird released in 1991 was discovered in March in the Borders. This bird was found lying on the ground of a gentleman's garden one morning when he went out to stock up the bird table. He noticed the distress of the bird and realised he was dealing with a species which was unfamiliar to him. He notified the SSPCA who took the kite to a veterinary surgeon. There the vet diagnosed alphachlorolose poisoning, the result of presumably having consumed part of an illegal bait set out for foxes and crows. Fortunately, in this case the bird recovered and was re-released in the Highlands with a new radio tag so as to monitor its progress. The bird then moved along the coast to Nairn, before moving northwards to take up residence near Golspie. This bird did make a full recovery, but it is also sad that an irresponsible minority persist in using indiscriminate poisons, which continue to put a lot of our rarest birds in danger.

1992 saw the first pair of Red Kites succeeding in producing the first Red Kite chick to be bred in Scotland for 120 years. This young bird held a winter territory and was seen at least until June 1993.

In early April 1993 the pair that nested successfully in 1992 returned to the breeding area and proceeded to get on with the business of nest building. By the end of April no fewer than 5 other nests with incubating females were located. Disturbance was kept to a minimum at this stage, however by mid May it became clear that 7 young had hatched from 3 nests, the other 2 females unfortunately sitting on addled eggs. At the age of 5 weeks five of the young kites were ringed and fitted with wing tags, to enable identification and hopefully confirm when the first Scottish reared kites start to breed.

Meanwhile in June Roy Dennis flew to Sweden to collect the final 24 kites for the release programme. The chicks are removed from the nests at four weeks of age, and are only taken from nests with 2 or more young therefore leaving the adults to rear at least one or two chicks. As it is vital that the young have the least possible contact with humans they are kept in special boxes in a field station and, apart from periodic feeding, are kept away from human contact. Thus they will not be imprinted on humans and will have the best chance of survival in the wild.



As in previous years the RAF assisted by flying the kites from Sweden to Scotland. From there they were taken to the release cages which are specially designed for remote feeding of the birds. After 5 weeks without any human contact the birds are removed from the cages and fitted with wing tags and radio. A few days later the front of the cages is opened remotely so the birds may leave and start their life in the wild. Being fitted with radios allows the progress of the birds to be followed during the first year of life when they are at their most vulnerable. Results so far indicate that the survival rate for young kites is high, and that the distances covered during the winter months by these young birds is very large, and that most returned to the release area the following spring.

Now that the final year for release has finished, monitoring will be concentrated on the breeding population as the new birds begin to colonise new areas. In 1994, progress continued: by mid-July no fewer than 8 pairs had been successful, raising between them 13 young. With a further 37 in England making a total of 50 chicks from the re-introduction scheme as a whole, the future looks encouraging.

This is another great achievement for Scottish ornithology.

The RSPB are very anxious to hear about any sightings of Red Kites and if you can supply details of the wing tag colours so much the better. (See notice Page 12)

Early spring 1994 saw the kites showing signs of breeding once again, with brief displays, talon grappling and pair bonding. The 5 pairs that bred in 1993 have all been seen again this season.

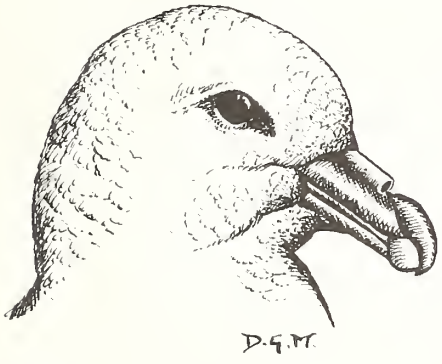
Red Kite with dead rabbit

RSPB

Buzzard and Kestrel fouled by Fulmar oil

On 27th June 1994, below Castle Craig cliffs at the North Sutor, Easter Ross, a Buzzard appeared on the rocks in front of us. It appeared to be oiled and in some distress. On closer inspection we found it was covered in Fulmar oil. The bird could not fly and was surviving by feeding on small Herring Gull chicks.

On 15th July, David Butterfield visited the same area and found a Kestrel also covered in Fulmar oil and flightless. It also appeared to be feeding on Herring Gull chicks.



Fulmar

David Mitchell

The oiling of raptors by Fulmars has long been known. Dennis 1970 (Scot. Birds 6:198-199) reported White-tailed Eagle, migrant Honey Buzzards and Ospreys being soiled by Fulmar oil on Fair Isle. Contamination of Peregrines by Fulmar oil is thought to be partly responsible for the decline in Peregrine numbers in Shetland (Scot. Birds 17:40-49). In Orkney Booth & Reynolds 1987 (Orkney Bird Report 1986:70-75) recorded 16 species that had been contaminated by Fulmar oil. There is a large Fulmar population at North Sutor where 1014 occupied sites were counted in 1991 (Scot. Birds 16:210). There is also a high raptor population. For instance 5 pairs of Buzzards nest within 2kms of the Sutor colonies. These observations show that the problem of raptors being fouled by Fulmar oil is not confined to the Northern Isles.

Robbie Swann (jnr)

Whimbrel. One of the birds which have suffered in Russia's "Virgin Lands".

John Chapman

Where does the Slender-billed Curlew nest? New ideas from Russia.

Many readers will have heard Mike Trubridge's lecture last season on this species. Earlier this year I asked our good friend Vadim Ryabitsev of the Institute of Plant and Animal Ecology in Ekaterinburg if he knew anything more about its breeding area. In reply he sent three articles which appeared in the 1992 and 1994 bulletins of the Menzbier Ornithological Society's wader study group.

One of these articles suggests that searches for the breeding sites have until now been in entirely the wrong habitat and part of the country. The author V.P. Belik believes that, instead of West Siberian forest bogs, a much more likely breeding area would be sandy regions in the steppe zone of western Kazakhstan or East Europe, in particular the edge of the Volga-Ural Sands.

Why have numbers of the Slender-billed Curlew declined so drastically? Belik points out that there has been relatively little human exploitation of West Siberian bogs, but a great deal of disturbance to the 'virgin lands' in the steppe zone. This has led to a serious decline there in the common Curlew, and the extermination of the steppe race of the Whimbrel. The common Curlew is now mainly confined to sandy regions unexploited by humans, and perhaps the Slender-billed Curlew nests there with it.

Geoffrey Harper.

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay - Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist - almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodland garden of Colonsay House.

Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (21/2 hour passage). Demi-pension from £57.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £135.00 weekly.

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N.B. Booklet @ £3.50 inc. p&p describes the island's birds - 66pp plus 8pp colour photos.

The 1994 Breeding Season Round-up

Raptors and Owls

In the main most raptors had a fairly reasonable season, although some early nests were lost due to the late snow. In Tayside and Central 4 home ranges for Golden Eagle were checked and although the outcome for all is not clear at least 2 successful pairs raised 3 young. This seems to be the normal low productivity despite the fact that plenty of blue hares were observed which was not the case with Red Grouse. Further north Eagles appear to have had a poor year. Peregrines on the other hand have fared fairly well, with at least 8 successful pairs raising 18 young in Tayside and Central; by comparison SE Scotland, Lothian and the Borders had several new pairs being found, and it is pleasing to note that robberies are down for the first time recently, although destruction of nests by man particularly on grouse moors remains a problem. The effect of the late April snow does not seem to have affected breeding performance and it looks like being a record year for Peregrines. Buzzard have also had a good year with new sites being found in Lothians, Borders and Fife. Merlin also appear to have had a more successful season than last year, although the final results will not be available for some time yet. In Orkney Eric Meek reports that occupancy rates by Merlins is down by 50% on 1993, but the pairs which did nest were quite successful with 8 nesting attempts raising 24 young. Ospreys in the Highlands have had a most unusually extended season with some pairs having young on the wing in early July and others only just hatching. A number of new pairs have been found, but some of the older established pairs failed to arrive at their usual sites. Red Kite however have had a very good year with 11 pairs on territory, 8 pairs breeding and six of those successfully rearing 13 young. Exceptional numbers of Sparrowhawks in the Lochalsh area contrasted with very low numbers of Kestrel while at an Ayrshire study area Gordon Riddle reports normal levels of Kestrel site occupation with well above average number of young reared. In Easter Ross it was noted that Kestrel had had an excellent year, in contrast to Fife where it is reported as very scarce. Hen Harriers have certainly had a very poor year with the number of pairs being found considerably reduced; in Orkney only 5 successful nests reared 11 young. Tawny Owl in Ayrshire did particularly badly possibly due to the bad weather in late March/early April. In west Central Scotland they were noted as having a fair season although the clutches were small; in a study area in Dumfries & Galloway Geoff Shaw reported high vole numbers with over 100 pairs of owls using nestboxes in Galloway Forest Park, more or less equal numbers of Barn/Tawny, and several pairs of Barn Owls hatching second broods in July. Reports from Borders and Lothian are of no young Tawny Owls or Long-eared Owls being reared at all. Short-eared Owls were also thin on the ground in Borders and Lothian, but had their best year for some time in Orkney.

Gamebirds and Corvids

Lothian and Borders reported a reasonable year for Red Grouse especially on lower moorland. The numbers of Black Grouse lekking in Central region are down which compares with the trend over much of the rest of Scotland.

Ravens in Central and Tayside appear to have had mixed fortunes. 31 territories checked held only 17 pairs; of these, 8 reared 15 or 16 young and another 3 successful pairs an unknown number of young. The late snow may have affected breeding success, some nests containing small young being covered by the snow, which also possibly made hunting for carrion difficult.

Shag with 3 chicks during better breeding seasons *Jim Young*

Seabirds

Reports from the Isle of May indicate a varied season with some species such as Shags being greatly reduced, apparently due to the loss of adults in the late winter wrecks along the length of the east coast of Scotland. Other seabirds such as Guillemot, Puffin, Kittiwake, Arctic/Common Terns, Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls remained at about the same levels as last year on the May. Kittiwake and Shag on Canna appeared to be doing well. The only bird which has increased on the Isle of May this year is the Razorbill.

On the May food appeared to be in short supply early in the season which resulted in reduced colony attendance (e.g. Guillemot) or even large numbers of pairs not laying (e.g. Kittiwake). Breeding was generally late and the earliest young Kittiwake only fledged at the end of July.

The Isle of May auks had a normal breeding success but few young Kittiwake are expected to fledge. This will be the 4th consecutive year that Kittiwake have experienced breeding failure. Shag will also have reared rather few young as many pairs that did return did not lay.

Many of the Common/Arctic Terns failed at the egg stage but those which survived this time did well. Overall, in excess of 500 young fledged from 700 pairs which is the best season since they recolonised the island in the early 1980s.

Although conditions late in the season had improved, the heavy mortality of Shags during the winter, massive non-breeding and many pairs failing early in the season, which of course resulted in low overall success for many species. This certainly reinforces the view that conditions in the Firth of Forth for seabirds is less than good. Expanding fishing for sandeels on the Wee Bankie just offshore is unlikely to help the situation

In Orkney the cliff-nesting seabirds appeared to be having a normal season. Black Guillemot are having one of their better years. This is not the case for Arctic Terns in Orkney where many colonies were deserted and some birds re-laying very late in the season it is doubted if they will succeed at all.

Good numbers of Cormorants and Terns were recorded in Easter Ross although their breeding success was below average.

Waders

In Easter Ross it was noted as a terrible breeding season for Lapwing, Ringed Plover and Oystercatcher; this is also the case for Lapwing in Highland and in the Dornoch area it is the first time in 42 years that no nests have been recorded. In Lothian and Borders Lapwing, Curlew and Oystercatcher have had more success than last year, but in Tayside Lapwing numbers were down. Oystercatcher remained much the same and Curlews nested in set-aside but Crows presented the usual problems. Common Sandpiper are noted as being scarce in a number of areas. Good numbers of Golden Plover were on breeding grounds in Highland , but a decline was noted in Dumfries & Galloway. Both Greenshank and Dunlin bred successfully in Highland region.

Wildfowl

On the R Tweed numerous broods of Mallard with 10+ juveniles are noted. In Easter Ross & Canna there were good numbers of both Mallard and Mute Swan, the former with large broods. On the R Nairn Mallard are noted as being down on 1993; this appears to be the only region to have recorded this. Mandarin and Goosander on the same river are up on 1993. Broods of 7 and 8 Mute Swans were on the Moray Firth. Teal in small burns in the Borders are in good numbers. In Orkney Red-throated Divers have had a very poor season in terms of breeding success, while Black-throated Divers in one Highland study area which holds 3 pairs all have 1 chick this year, and an area in Central had 2 pairs for the first time ever, but unfortunately one pair failed when their nest was flooded out by rising water levels. The avoidance of this is one of the big advantages of the floating islands placed in suitable lochs that divers frequent. Eiders are having a good year both in the Lochalsh area and on the Isle of May with c1000 nests which is the highest ever recorded.

Red-throated Diver at nest *Sydney Clarke*

Slavonian Grebe north of the Great Glen have shown a sharp decline in the number of pairs present this year. Black-necked Grebe at the RSPB reserve at Kinnordy have an amazing 11 pairs this year.

Moorhen in the area around Dornoch are becoming scarce, and are now usually only seen on some of the larger lochs. However, in the Borders a Waterways Bird Survey plot noted especially large numbers although Mark Holling states that this is not the case elsewhere.

Pied & Grey Wagtails in Dumfries and Galloway appear fewer, with early clutches/ broods small but better later in the season. In the Lothian and Borders areas Dipper appear to be alright, while Grey Wagtail are less common this year.

Warblers

Wood Warblers in Central are about average, but seem to be on the increase in south-west Scotland, while Willow Warbler in Central appear to be numerous but predation seemed to be higher than normal. In 2 areas in north Scotland it was also noticed that both Wood and Willow Warblers were present in good numbers, and in the Lochalsh area Grasshopper Warblers are widespread. In the area around Dornoch there is only one reported record so far this year of a Whitethroat, but in both Tayside and the Borders Whitethroat appear to to having a good year. Norman Elkins reported from Fife that both Garden Warbler and Chiffchaff have increased since 1993. Blackcap has only been reported from the Borders area, which no doubt reflects only a lack of information rather than of birds.

Hirundines

Sand Martin colonies in Borders appear to be down in number again this year, although in Easter Ross they are reported as being in good numbers. Swallows are having mixed fortunes with some areas reporting good numbers others saying numbers are down again this year. House Martins are continuing to decline in a lot of areas but fortunately not all.

Summer Migrants (not previously covered)

Mark Holling has only heard one Cuckoo

in the Borders despite several visits to areas normally frequented by Cuckoos in May and June; this is in contrast to Mike Trubridge at the RSPB reserve at Inversnaid who reported Cuckoo numbers to be still high. Roy Dennis reports seeing 2 young Cuckoos flying near Nethybridge, but also reports hearing Cuckoos calling normally in mid July which is incredibly late. Mike's study area for Pied Flycatchers has done better this year thanks in part to the fact that a number of concrete nestboxes were erected to prevent predation by Pine Martens and this appears to have been successful, with none of the 17 occupied boxes being predated. In Henry Robb's study area also in west Central he reports numbers down by 10% on last year and also clutch size being smaller. A similar story arises in Glentrool where the number of singing males was normal but more than half remain unmated. Redstarts in Henry's area are down by 25% with more late broods than usual, and Geoff Shaw also noticed a decline in numbers in Glentrool; this seems to be the case over most of Scotland. David Arthur's study area in an Angus glen for Ring Ouzel recorded a slightly lower success rate than in 1993 although clutch size was comparable to 1993, but at Lochalsh Ring Ouzel are scarce again this year. A noticeable decline in Wheatears has been noticed from a number of areas evenly spaced throughout Scotland. Very few comments were made about Meadow Pipits other than that numbers appear to be down on last year. One bird that appears to be doing better again in parts of Scotland is the Stonechat and a pair bred successfully in the Borders, the first time for 10 years. Whinchat and Spotted Flycatcher appear to be having mixed fortunes in differing parts of the country. The number of calling Corncrakes has more than doubled to 13 in Orkney this year.

Other Songbirds

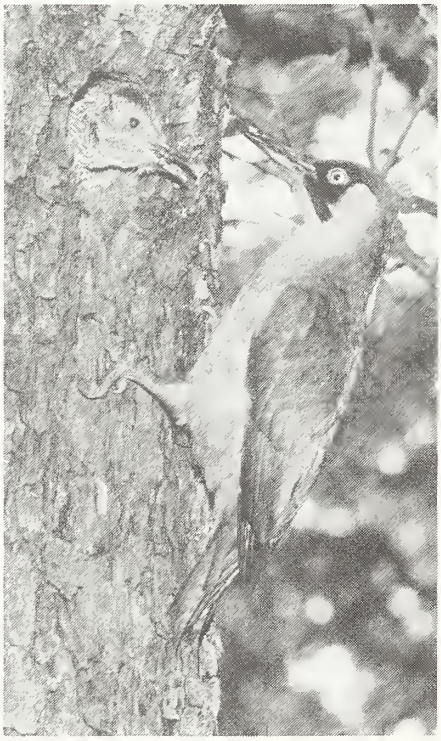
Great and Blue Tits would appear to be on the increase; could this be due to the fact that more people are now feeding birds in their gardens? although this was not the case throughout Scotland. Late broods of Song Thrush, Blackbird and Dunnock are noted particularly in the Borders and Lothian, and D Macdonald was delighted to find at least 14 Song Thrush during the breeding season near Dornoch. Geoff Shaw noted many Siskin breeding in Glentrool, and a good Sitka cone crop, but with little in the way of cones for next winter/spring. It will be interesting to see what effect this has on the breeding numbers. Malcolm Ross reports Reed Buntings few and far between, and we have no other comments on this species. At a long term study of Tree Sparrows near Blairgowrie numbers are down this year, but do tend to fluctuate in any case, although the decline in the acreage of raspberries grown in the area may be having a knock on effect. The only record of Green Woodpecker came from Alex Joss who has finally managed to confirm breeding in the R Nairn area. A comment from Stan da Prato about the scarcity of Bullfinch and a local increase in Goldfinch numbers around Tranent may be linked to the increase in set aside, although I have noticed a large increase in Goldfinches in Perthshire this year.

Thanks are again due to the following:- David Arthur, John Calladine, Roy Dennis, Dave Dick, Norman Elkins, Sandra Hacker, Mike Harris, Malcolm Harvey, Mark Holling, Alex Joss, D Macdonald, Eric Meek, Brian Neath, Ian Poxton, Stan da Prato, Gordon Riddle, Henry Robb, Malcolm Ross, Geoff Shaw, Patrick Stirling-Aird, Bob Swann, Mike Trubridge and Sarah Wanless.

As always we stress that fieldworkers' first impressions are not to be interpreted as the definitive account of the 1994 season. That comes later when the appropriate bodies have analysed all the data. Many of the contributors to the summary are active fieldworkers, taking part in various survey or monitoring schemes.

Sylvia Laing

Green Woodpecker feeding chick
Jim Young



Capercaillie nesting in tree.

On checking a large bird of prey nest in a Pine woodland in Morayshire in May 1994, I noted small pale feathers on the rim of the nest. A ground search beneath the tree produced several larger and obvious grouse type feathers. From one angle some ten paces away from the trunk it was possible to discern seven or eight inches of Capercaillie tail feathers. Assuming this to be a dead bird I climbed to the nest in the hope of ascertaining the cause of death, but, as my head appeared over the rim of the nest, a female Capercaillie suddenly took off revealing 9 eggs. I left the area as soon as possible.

A couple of days later a friend accompanied me to the area, and the bird was visible in almost the same position as my previous visit. We left the area without disturbing her this time.

With the same friend we made a further visit at the beginning of June. This time no bird being present I again climbed the tree, to find that the eggs had hatched, most of the shells being in small fragments; however two had the smaller part of the shell tucked into the larger part. On this occasion I took the opportunity to measure the height of the tree from the bottom of the shallow nest cup to the base of the tree. The height was a little over thirty two feet.

The habitat is typically Capercaillie, being of well spaced mature Scots Pines, with undergrowth predominately Blaeberry with some Heather. The nest, discovered last year, was likely to have been that of a bird

of prey. It was unused in 1993. The nest is situated against the trunk of the tree, which is some sixty feet in height.

A search of literature to date has only produced Desmond Nethersole-Thompson's observations in Witherby's 'Handbook of British Birds' (1944) , where it states 'exceptionally in a nest in a tree 10/15 feet above the ground'. Other books simply credit Desmond, or appear to do so, even the 'Birds of the Western Palearctic' by expediently converting the feet to 3/5 metres.

To me there is one question that begs an answer, what nests did Desmond find Capercaillies nesting in? In Capercaillie habitat there can be few species of birds that build nests large enough for a Caper to occupy. A few that come to mind may be Buzzard, Sparrowhawk or Crow. It is as exceptional to find any of these species nesting as low as 10/15 feet as it is for Capercaillie to occupy them! Or are we looking too low?

Harvey Burton

Peregrine versus Dunlin

We were sitting at The Wig on Loch Ryan on a glorious, still, sunny day in March, having our picnic lunch, when we noticed a flock of Dunlin take off from the pebbles on the nearby island. They began to turn and weave in a tight formation, when they were suddenly thrown into turmoil by a predator which dived into their midst. This was followed by a second, smaller predator, which dived in the same way, further fragmenting the flock. The pair of Peregrines then continued to harry the waders, without a break, until they had managed to separate a lone Dunlin from the pack. They continued to dive at this unfortunate little bird without any respite, and it made the mistake of flying high to try to escape, but it quickly decided that that was not a good idea, so it returned to sea level. Here it did not escape, and the Peregrines gave it not a moment's respite, once pushing it under the water from which it managed to free itself, but not for long. The male made another dive, and plucked it up, and flew higher. The female followed it, and as they closed the male handed over the prey to her, and flew towards the land, with a Herring Gull in close pursuit. In less than a minute the two Peregrines reappeared, flying slowly in circles and getting higher and higher, without any signs of their prey.

Kenneth C.R. Halliday

Adult Dunlin *S M D Alexander*

Unusual Oystercatcher nesting behaviour

In the spring of each year we routinely search for wader nests, under licence, in order that we can contribute to the BTO's Nest Record Scheme and, later, ring the chicks. In 1992 we located two cases of Oystercatcher nesting that were of interest.

The first nest was on the ground on a strip of cultivated land about 25m on the Strathclyde side of the march with the Borders, at an altitude of 225m asl. On 6th June the nest held 5 eggs, 3 heavily blotched and 2 more finely marked, pointing to the possibility of the involvement of 2 females.

On 10th June the following observations were made:- When I arrived an adult, bird A, was incubating on the nest in a sleeping posture, with another, bird B, in a guard position standing on a fence post some 20m distant. A third bird, bird C, flew in to land about 15m from the nest. There was much noisy calling at this point. B then flew down into such a position that the nest, A, C and B were in an almost straight line from my viewing position. C sidled in towards the nest, A rose and walked away picking at bits of grass stems and C settled on what looked like 5 eggs. A then flew off into a neighbouring field. After only two minutes B walked in and changed over with C and settled on the eggs as C walked round in a circle to stand within 2m of B as it was incubating. Four minutes after their changeover C walked up to B which rose and walked away picking and flicking pieces of loose vegetation. As C once again settled to incubate B sat down in a sleeping posture about 2m from the nest.

On 15th June there was 1 chick within 2m of the nest where an adult brooded; on 16th June an adult shepherded 3 chicks; on 20th June we ringed 3 chicks; only 3 chicks were seen and the nest was empty. It is not known if the 3 chicks were from the heavily blotched eggs, nor whether or not the other 2 eggs hatched. This incidence of a trio of waders involved in incubation is unusual but is recorded in the literature (Cramp et al. BWP Vol. 3). It points to confirming the proposition that the clutch of 5 eggs was the result of laying by two different females.

The second case involved a pair that nested in a hollow in the top of a stump of felled Ash, about 1.3m above ground level and less than 3m from a main road. This site was about 100m on the Borders side of the march with Strathclyde at an altitude of 205m asl, and about 10km from that described above.

An adult incubated a clutch of 2 eggs on 19th May and an adult was seen almost daily, sitting on this nest, until 7th June. The following day the two chicks were with the adults in the adjacent hay meadow and were ringed on 10th June.

In 1993 a pair of Oystercatchers again used the stump nest site but the attempt failed after only 6 days, possibly as a result of the disturbance caused when the nearby road was resurfaced. (See SBN 13:15 for a similar occurrence but a happier outcome). Note that in 1989, with others, we had located an Oystercatcher nest in a growing Beech, about 4km away from this site; see SBN 15:9.

David & Margaret Thorne.

Our thanks to Dr T W Dougall for his comments on an earlier draft.

REVIEWS

Ring Ouzels of the Yorkshire Dales *by Ian Appleyard. W.S. Maney & Son Ltd, Hudson Road, Leeds LS9 7DL. 1994. £14.99 incl p&p. ISBN 0 901286 40 0*

Ian Appleyard's account of Ring Ouzels (Turdus torquatus) in the Yorkshire Dales is a stimulating one and is the first serious attempt to devote a book specifically to this much neglected species. Ian's 15 years' account of this challenging species probably gives the reader some insight into the reasons for ornithologists' lack of interest. The terrain, weather and difficulty of following Ring Ouzels in the field and the time and patience required to study this bird, require long hours of fieldwork. This has however, paid off for Ian who, ably assisted by his wife Philippa, has produced an interesting and well documented account of the breeding biology of Ring Ouzels in the Yorkshire Dales. He brings together some of the biological references by other ornithologists interested in Ring Ouzels in recent years in Britain, e.g. Flegg & Glue, Durman & Poxton, and, combined with his own methodical fieldwork and using his knowledge gained over the years of Ring Ouzels' behaviour, has worked hard and has written a worthwhile account of Ring Ouzels in this upland environment.

He gives an interesting account of behavioural aspects of the Ring Ouzel throughout the breeding season, with information gathered regarding nest sites and nest building, together with useful information regarding incubating and nesting periods.

Another aspect is the question of second broods which the author believes is more common than first thought by some previous ornithologists, while his proven case of two third broods provides further interest. Having spent several years studying Ring Ouzels myself I have to agree with Ian's conclusions regarding second broods.

Interesting comments on plumage of the females regarding aging by means of the gorget becoming more distinct the older the bird becomes, is worth further examination. Relationships between Blackbirds and other species in the study area and the long term study of his territory birds all add up to an excellent contribution to Ring Ouzel biology.

Ian has laid down a baseline for gathering future information of the study of Ring Ouzels in future years. The book provides the reader with an excellent account of this understudied summer migrant and hopefully will encourage further interest from ornithologists.

The chapter devoted to bird photography and the necessary equipment required with the use of video cameras in gathering behavioural information is another interesting facet of Ian's study.

One of the outstanding features of the book is the number of excellent photographs depicting Ring Ouzel behaviour in the field. They are perhaps the best group of photographs devoted to this species in any publication available at present. This is a special book which is worthwhile adding to the amateur and serious ornithologist's library.

David Arthur.

Due to shortage of space other reviews have been held over till the next issue.

Ring Ouzels of the Yorkshire Dales by Ian Appleyard

A fifteen-year study of 353 occupied Ring Ouzel Territories in the Yorkshire Dales beautifully illustrated with 80 of the author's own colour photographs.

Chapters on behaviour, nest locations and building, incubation and nestling periods, double and treble broods, territories, predation, courtship and display, voice and sonagrams, photography and use of video camera.

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Endowment Fund Grants

9 new grant applications totalling £1400 were considered by SOC Council in March 1994, all bar two of these were supported and the following grants given:-

1. Stonechat studies in Grampian - A Thorpe - £50
2. St Kilda Gannet Census - S Murray - £750
3. Post-breeding dispersal of Crested Tit - W Taylor - £50 to be awarded each year for 3 years.
4. Twite wintering in Caithness - H Clark - £100
5. Glen Esk Ring Ouzels - D Arthur - £150 to be awarded each year for 3 years.
6. Buzzards in Galloway - I Langford - £100 each year for 3 years and £100 in first year towards safety equipment.
7. Seabirds on the Forth Islands - Lothian Ringing Group - £100 each year for 3 years.

2 grants in their final year were R Duncan - Wigeon studies in Grampian and L Brown - Goose study in Fife.

The new applications received in 1994 illustrate the variety of topics which can form the bases of detailed study by mainly amateur fieldworkers. Individuals, groups and SOC Branches therefore are urged to make use of the Endowment Fund - there must be a number of potential projects waiting for a small financial input to get them started or to realise their full potential.

Anyone interested in applying to the Fund should contact the SOC at 21 Regent Terrace to obtain a leaflet and application form. The closing date for applications to be considered by Council in March 1995 is 31st October 1994.

David Jardine, Chairman, Surveys & Research Committee.

SOC NOTICES

Evening opening of Waterston Library

The Waterston Library will again be open for three hours one evening per month from September to December.

The times for this session are 18.00 - 21.00 hours on the following dates :- Monday 26th September; Monday 17th October; Monday 21st November and Monday 12th December 1994.

PLEASE TELEPHONE 031 556 6042 BEFOREHAND TO CONFIRM.

For Sale in aid of Waterston Library

IBIS vols 95-132 (1953-90) in parts, plus 3 special Centenary Expedition issues **£200**.

BRITISH BIRDS vols. 44-73 (1951-80) in 30 bound volumes in standard bindings, plus vols 74-83 (1981-90) in parts **£350**.

BIRD STUDY vols. 4-36 (1957-89) in parts **£100**.

Also shorter runs of these and other journals. **Contact:- Bill Harper, Librarian 031 556-6042**

Thanks

Thanks are once again due to the following Margaret Abel, Rosemary Davidson, Hetty Harper, Brian Robertson, Bob & Betty Smith and Joan Wilcox. Without their help this would be an impossible task. If you have any time to spare once every three months and would like to help the club we would be very pleased to hear from you.

CONSTITUTION

Any members who would like a copy of the Club's constitution, incorporating amendments agreed at recent AGMs may have one on request from 21 Regent Terrace.

GREETINGS CARDS & T-SHIRTS

Council have agreed that the Club should incorporate greetings cards and T-shirts for the benefit of Club funds. If you would be prepared to help organise this, please contact us on 031 556 6042.

Forth Seabird Group

Enthusiasts who regularly study seabirds breeding in the Firth of Forth have recently formed the Forth Seabird Group. Their main aim is to co-ordinate the annual monitoring of the seabird populations of all the Forth islands from the bridges to the Isle of May. The group includes representatives from the S.O.C., R.S.P.B., S.N.H. and I.T.E. as well as individuals. Similar-minded birdwatchers keen on joining the activities of the group are invited to contact the Group's chairman, **Dave Fairlamb,** for further information. Dave is the **RSPB warden at Vane Farm Reserve, by Loch Leven, Kinross, Tayside KY13 7LX.**

Field Guides for Russia

There has been a tremendous response by SOC members to the request to send field guides to Russia to help local ornithologists in the Urals (SBN March 1994). By the end of May 20 guides plus other books had been sent to Dr Vadim Ryabitsev of the Menzbier Ornithological Society.

He is delighted to receive these guides which will be circulated to members of his 90 strong society most in need, who can read a little English. Dr Ryabitsev has explained that "There are 150,000 square kilometres of territory per ornithologist in the Western Urals. There are big areas which are 'white spots' on our ornithological map. We must attract more bird watchers but the lack of books is a permanent problem.".

Personal letters have been sent by Dr Ryabitsev to all SOC members who have contributed guides. If anyone else has guides they no longer need they will be well received, but any bird books will be a great help. Details of where to send them can be obtained from Branch Secretaries. This is a simple way to foster international cooperation between ornithologists. One outcome already is that further information has been obtained about the Slender-billed Curlew, which is reported in this issue.

Thanks to everyone who has supported this initiative.

Roger Brewer.

SOC Annual Raffle

It is the Fife Branch's second year at organising the raffle and we trust that you will attempt to sell your ticket allocation and possibly return for more. Further tickets are available on request from 21 Regent Terrace.

As you will see from the tickets enclosed with this mailing, the prizes are of the usual high standard. This year however the top prizes are cash - a first prize of £200 and a second prize of £100.

We look forward to receiving donations of further prizes, both by branches and individuals. Please contact **Brian Downing, 51 Lade Braes, St Andrews, Fife KY16 9DA, Telephone 0334 472664.**

Please note that all monies and ticket stubs should be sent to **Anne-Marie Smout, Chesterhill, Shore Road, Anstruther, Fife KY10 3DZ.**

Ringers' Conference

The Tay Ringing Group are hosting the 20th Scottish Ringers' Conference at the Fife Arms Hotel, Braemar from 18th - 20th November 1994.

Booking forms and programmes can be obtained from;- **Steve Moyes, 8 Lethnot Street, Barnhill, Dundee.**

Scottish Birds Records Committee Election of New Member

In 1990 S.B.R.C. commenced a rotation of its members, with one retiring each year. Bernard Zonfrillo is due to stand down in November this year and to fill the vacancy the committee is nominating David Clugston, who lives in Paisley. David is a well known Scottish based birdwatcher who has travelled widely and has an extensive knowledge of most birds on the Scottish List.

Further nominations to fill the vacancy are invited and should be submitted to me by 30th October, being signed by both a proposer and seconder who must both be S.O.C. members. If there should be more than one nomination, a postal ballot will take place, in which all S.O.C. local recorders will be eligible to vote.

Ron Forrester, Secretary S.B.R.C., 31 Argyle Terrace, Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 0BD.

Look out for Goosanders!

In August 1993 the Tay Ringing Group on behalf of Mick Marquiss from the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology managed to catch, ring and wing tag 8 Goosanders on the Eden Estuary L.R.N.

This was the second year a catch had been attempted and in 1992, 22 Goosanders were tagged with a blue tag and dark blue lettering. In 1993 the tag was red with white lettering. Results so far would indicate that these birds which moult on the Eden Estuary actually come from the south and west with reports from Dumfries & Galloway, the Peak District and even Wales. If anyone has sightings of any of these birds please get in touch with **Les Hatton, North East Fife Ranger Services, Craigtown Country Park, St Andrews, Fife KY16 8NX Tel 033472151.** All sightings will be acknowledged.

Wing-tagged Red Kites released in Scotland

All Red Kites released in Scotland as part of the joint JNCC/RSPB reintroduction project have been fitted with wing tags. The tags are not necessarily the same on each wing. (See SBN 33 & 34 for illustrated details of tags). Please contact **Lorcan O'Toole** with any sighting however incomplete at **RSPB, North Scotland Office, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW., tel 0463 715000** as soon as possible so that sightings can be followed up.

Colour ringed Ring Ouzels

A study by David Arthur of Ring Ouzels in Glen Esk, Angus is now in its third year. A number of birds have been individually colour ringed, and any sightings of colour ringed Ring Ouzels will be greatly appreciated by David. Please contact **David Arthur, 12 Dundee Street, Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7PD. 0241 853356.** All sightings will be acknowledged.

Wing-tagged Hen Harriers

Marked birds are carrying a coloured tag on each wing. Although the colour on each wing may be different a single letter or number is repeated on each tag. Details of any sightings however incomplete should be sent to Brian Etheridge, RSPB North Scotland Office, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW tel 0463 715000 as soon as possible.

200 Club

Winners in the second quarter of 1994 were:-

April 1st. £30 - P.W. Speak, Edinburgh; 2nd. £20 - Miss I.W.C. Hunter, Ayr; 3rd. £10 - A.L. Ross, Inverness.
May 1st. £50 - Prof P.J.B. Slater, St Andrews; 2nd. £30 - A. Maciver, Falkirk; 3rd. £20 - Miss J.M. Lawson, Edinburgh; 4th. £10 - Dr A.V.M. Davidson, St Andrews.
June 1st. £30 - R.L. Gardner, Kirkcudbright; 2nd. £20 - A.G.S. Bryson, Edinburgh; 3rd. £10 - M.J. Bickmore, by Selkirk.

Although the 200 Club's 'year' started on 1st June, you can join any time. If you would like to join now, please send me a cheque (payable to "SOC 200 Club") for £9 - or £18 if you would like to take out a double subscription - and your membership will last until 31st May 1995. You will be entered into the monthly draw for prizes which, in a full year, amount to over £1,000. Please send your cheque to me at **Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL (tel 089 682 2176)**

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe.

Colour-ringed Stonechats

Over the past three years I have been colour-ringing mainly pullus Stonechat at coastal and inland sites near Aberdeen. So far approximately 100+ birds have been marked and it is intended to continue the study for a further 3 years.

Indications are that young birds move considerable distances and I would therefore be grateful for any sightings of such birds anywhere in Scotland. Note should be made of the combination and which leg bears the metal and which the colour rings. All sightings will be acknowledged. **Andy Thorpe, 15 Albyn Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 1YP.**

Enclosed with this issue

Annual Report, Winter Syllabus 1994/95, Conference Booking Form and Renewal Form (for those members who do not pay byBankersOrder).

Should any of these not be enclosed please contact 21 Regent Terrace.

SOC Lothian Branch Discussion Group

Members may be interested to know that there is an additional monthly meeting arranged by the Lothian Branch : the "Discussion Group". This will particularly be of interest to members keen on fieldwork or conservation matters. The meetings are held at 21 Regent Terrace in Edinburgh, so clearly this will not be convenient for many members, but all visiting members as well as more local members are very welcome to attend. We have in the past few years had visitors from Shetland and Glasgow. The meetings occur on the first Wednesday of each month from September to April at 7.30pm in the SOC Library.

The "fieldwork" discussed includes organised studies such as BTO surveys, wildfowl and wader counts, goose roost counts, ringing, raptor studies, atlas work and local surveys organised by the branch or individuals. This is an informal meeting covering recent or forthcoming surveys and items of local or national conservation interest. For anyone interesting in becoming more involved in surveys, it is an ideal opportunity to find out more.

There is usually time to mention recent bird sightings, and always time for a cup of tea and a cake brought by members of the group. Occasionally, other people active in areas of interest to the group are invited to lead a discussion. Recently we have met RSPB conservation officers and survey organisers, and representatives from FWAG and from WWT.

If you are already an active fieldworker, or would like to become more active, then please join us. The dates of the first meetings this autumn are 7th September, 5th October, 2nd November and 7th December. If you would like further information, then please contact the **Chairman, Mark Holling on 0578-760239.**

SOC Photo Competition.

Entries for this year's photo competition should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace by 28th October 1994 at the latest. Acknowledgements will be sent to all entrants and photos returned in early November.

If anybody has any funny slides of prominent SOC people which could be used at the basis of a light hearted quiz please let us know, on 031 556 6042.

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BIRD

THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

DECEMBER 1994 No. 36
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Edited by Sylvia Laing
and Stan da Prato

As members will see in the heading Stan da Prato has come back to help edit Scottish Bird News with me, and I would like to take this opportunity to welcome him back into the main stream activities of the club. I for one know he will be a great asset to the production of SBN. Welcome back Stan.

MAR 1 9 1

ACCESS

This isn't a feature on your flexible friend but a summary of some important recent developments concerning access to the habitats in which Scotland's birdlife occurs. The access issue has featured quite a bit in the media recently but mainly through the concerns of mountaineers and walkers on one hand, and estate owners and managers on the other, over access to the hills. In fact the issue is at least as important to naturalists since they are less interested in following the quickest route to the top of a hill than in exploring its quieter recesses to check on things such as whether a pair of birds are breeding or not.

Recent legislation, notably certain sections of the Criminal Justice and Public Order (1994) Act has raised concerns that it will now be easier for unsympathetic landowners to keep their estates strictly private. Against this background, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) published an important policy statement entitled 'Enjoying the Outdoors - a Programme for Action' in October.

Traditional Misconceptions

Most outdoor types are under the impression that, at least on unfenced land, there is no law of trespass in Scotland. This is not correct. The long standing tradition often expressed as 'freedom to roam' has no legal standing. However, for an owner to prevent access has, until this year, involved a civil court action against named individuals. In practice, land managers have relied on varying degrees of persuasion. This could vary from polite and informative notices requesting visitors to contact them at sensitive times of the year, usually August-October, to prevent conflict during grouse shooting or stag stalking, to rather threatening notices advising of the danger from high powered rifles to anyone straying from marked paths.

Areas other than hill land have had their own disagreements over access. The question of whether canoeists can or cannot paddle down salmon rivers is one, though that is hardly a problem for the birdwatcher. He, or she, is more likely to be concerned over access to such habitats as forest or the coast. In the former case, the selling off of sectors of Forestry Commission woods has often led to a less welcoming attitude. In the case of the coast, problems are relatively rare; when they do arise they usually relate to crossing fenced land adjacent to the shore rather than the inter tidal zone.

Peregrine with 3 well fed chicks. *Jim Young*

Golden Eagle with young. Another bird of the hill ground. *Jim Young*

New Legislation

The Criminal Justice Act, which becomes law this year, has already resulted in some dramatic protests, though not by naturalists. Government has always claimed that the intention behind the new offence of 'aggravated trespass' is to deal with New Age Travellers and hunt saboteurs, largely in England. This has not entirely reassured many in Scotland, including lawyers, who predict that the Act could be used indiscriminately against hill walkers or naturalists by a determined landowner. Briefly, the Act allows the police to order a person(s) off land when the officer believes that person(s) has committed or is intending to commit any action likely to obstruct or disrupt legitimate activities such as deer stalking - and some shooters claim that simply walking over the ground in the stalking season is disruptive. However the Scottish Landowners Federation (SLF) has stated that "the new law could not be used to convict walkers and others enjoying the countryside in a reasonable way". It is also interesting that many experienced ornithologists who work in the hills seem to share this view.

SNH and its policy

It is against this background that Scottish Natural Heritage's (SNH) policy statement has to be read. The document that finally appeared in October had been the subject of a consultation exercise that attracted nearly 500 responses, many of them critical or at least cynical over SNH's commitment to 'freedom to roam' and its attitude to private landowning interests.

Not surprisingly, the paper stops short of calling for legislation to establish a clear 'right to roam' similar to that so well established in Scandinavia. However, the need for clarification of the law is acknowledged as is the probability that legislation might be necessary in the future. The main proposals centre round a 'Paths for All' Initiative to be largely organised by local authorities (themselves currently being reorganised) using funding from sources such as the Millennium Fund and the National Lottery. They also repeat the point they have used elsewhere that a reform of the European Common Agricultural Policy could release considerable resources.

The report relies heavily on an extension of the voluntary principle through codes of practice for outdoor users supported by better funding; both to be handled by a more positive attitude to visitors by owners and managers.

Political Realities

Given the attitude of the current Government and the opposition to legislation confirming rights of access by the Scottish Landowners, National Farmers Union and even the Scottish Sports Council, it is difficult to see what other course SNH could have taken. However, funding for their proposals may be less generous than they hope while the new single tier local authorities which are mostly smaller than the regions they are to replace (Highland is a notable exception) may be preoccupied with running priority services such as education. The idea of marked paths is an anathema to many mountaineers but in the context of farm land and forestry, it could clearly improve access; and most people who wish to walk in the countryside don't want to go as far as the high tops.

In the short term, the way forward has to be voluntary consensus - ornithologists, especially those carrying out long term studies, are aware of this and most try to build up good relations with land managers. In the longer term a more clear cut definition of the access position seems essential and it is interesting that all the opposition political parties have promised action on this front.

Stan da Prato

The SNH document referred to in Stan's article runs to 100 lavishly illustrated pages and costs £7.50. SOC members can consult it in the Club library.

Stop Press

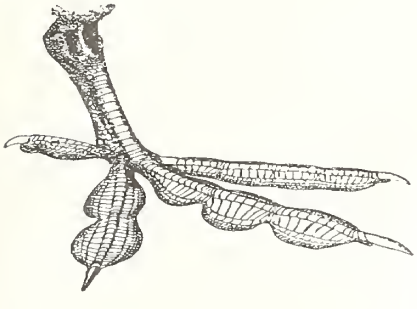
The 1994 Annual Conference was held in the Marine Hotel, North Berwick, the programme was a particularly varied one and general reaction has been extremely favourable. However, the number attending was disappointing. We were no longer able to comand exclusive use of the hotel. Cost seems to be the main problem. It looks most unlikely that we shall return to the Marine. Next years venue is being discussed by Management Committee who will consulting widely before taking a decision.

The battle against illegal poisoning still goes on.

The RSPB and SNH are appealing for information to help find the person or persons responsible for the poisoning of a second Golden Eagle in the Monadhliath mountains to the south of Inverness. In May this year a Golden Eagle was found near the headwaters of the river Findhorn, and examinations revealed that the bird had been killed by the highly toxic substance Carbofuran, in the same area as one was found last year. So far no firm evidence has been found to identify the person or persons responsible.

The RSPB are also investigating the poisoning of 2 Buzzards with alphachlorolose less than a mile apart in the Bridge of Earn area of Perthshire. These illegal poisoning methods endanger not only birds and animals but domestic pets and children.

This brings the total to 13 poisoning incidents resulting in the deaths of no fewer than 13 Buzzard, 1 Golden Eagle, 1 Jackdaw, 1 Rook, 1 Peregrine and 1 Sheepdog, with a few still under investigation. Numerous other birds have been killed by illegal methods this year, such as pole or gin traps, and shooting. Anybody finding a dead bird in what may be suspicious circumstance are asked to contact Dave Dick or Keith Morton at the RSPB's headquarters in Edinburgh or your local police station.



Licence issued to shoot protected geese

The Scottish Office has again issued a licence to kill internationally protected Barnacle Geese.

Farmer, Daniel Quinn, of Powhillon Farm, at Caerlaverock on the Solway, has, for the second year running, been given permission to shoot the winter visitors from the Arctic, which he claims are destroying his farmland.

Mr Quinn is the only person in Scotland allowed to kill the birds, which are protected on their breeding grounds on the Norwegian island of Spitsbergen and on their wintering grounds on the Solway. Last year he shot ten geese to encourage the grazing flocks to leave his grassland.

Ironically the land is owned by the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust. However due to an agricultural tenancy agreement in place when the land was purchased WWT cannot directly manage the farm.

It seems the licence was approved after Mr Quinn threatened to shoot the birds, whether he was granted a licence or not.

The WWT director-general Dr Myrfyn Owen, said: "This decision could be read as a clear signal from the Scottish Office that it pays to take the law into your own hands. The licence has been granted, despite the fact that relatively small numbers of geese use this particular farm".

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the Government environment agency, hopes to defuse the row by offering farmers a one-year pilot scheme in which they would be paid compensation for putting up with geese on their land.

Around 13,700 geese - the entire Spitsbergen population - now winter on the Solway. The figure has increased from under a few hundred in the 1950s.

Several farmers are waiting to hear what is on offer from SNH before deciding on applications to the Scottish Office agriculture and fisheries department for licences to kill.

Colour ringed Barnacle goose

Myrfyn Owen

Charles Frank

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Isle of May Bird Observatory is 60 years old

The Isle of May Bird Observatory marked its 60th anniversary with a day trip to the island on the 10th September. Amongst those visiting the island were Ian Balfour-Paul and Mr & Mrs Ian Munro who have been associated with the observatory from its earliest days.

A bench was taken to the low light in memory of Joe Eggeling who did so much for the observatory and in developing the island as a national nature reserve.

There were few migrants present but a Black Redstart was ringed. Of greatest interest to the visitors was the archaeological dig around the chapel which has exposed the foundations of the earlier buildings (12th century) together with a fascinating burial ground. The excavations provide visible evidence to support the many historical legends referred to in Joe Eggelings book.

Whilst we enjoyed sunshine throughout our visit our stay was shortened by a fresh north-west wind which developed during the morning. As a result we had a wet and very "interesting" return sailing to Anstruther!

Ian Darling

The party who attended the 60th anniversary celebrations on the Isle of May on 10th September.
Seated on the bench which was taken over in memory of Joe Eggeling are:-
l-r Ian Munro, Bep Munro and Ian Balfour-Paul

Bernie Zonfrillo

1936 on the Isle of May. Ringing at the Low Trap, in the background is the first ringing hut in the process of being built. Some well known SOC members at the catching box of one of the heligoland traps are:- l -r the late Frank Elder, Archie Bryson and Donald Watson.

Cleaner Seas

Concern about the threats to seabirds and marine life from pollution is being highlighted by the RSPB through its Marine Life Campaign.

To get its point to the appropriate people RSPB local officers have organised boat trips to a number of important marine habitats. For example in the Firth of Forth the boat 'Maid of the Forth' transported around 50 civil servants, local authority and other specialists in waste management and pollution control as well as the SOC membership secretary. Fortunately the vessel did not run aground as it had to the alarm of the parents of a recent school excursion!

Further north Dr Tim Stowe of the RSPB's Highland office arranged a meeting recently with influential people from Highland Region including Charles Kennedy, MP. Following a short presentation outlining the issues involved before setting out on a boat trip around the inner Moray Firth. The Moray Firth area is particularly important for the variety of birds which winter in the sheltered firth, and could be at danger from any number of problems due to pollution of our seas. Highland Region has the chance to lead the rest of Europe in coming up with positive proposals to ensure strong economic and industrial development as well as a healthy environment.

Charles Kennedy MP commented "I very much appreciate having the opportunity to see for myself the threats which are posed to the seabirds in the Moray Firth. Our marine environment must be safeguarded and the Highlands has a vital role to play in showing that marine conservation and economic development can - and must - work together".

Insh Marshes

With help from SNH the RSPB has bought a further 500 acres near its Insh Marshes Reserve, Balavil estate near Kingussie adjoins the existing reserve and brings the Society's land holding in Badenoch to some 4 square miles.

The Insh Marshes lie between Kingussie and Loch Insh and on either side of the River Spey. It is one of Britain's most important sites for breeding wildfowl and is home to some 700 pairs of waders and 500 pairs of duck. The area lies within a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and is internationally important for its plant, bird and invertebrate communities. In recognition of this, SNH gave the RSPB a grant of £63,000 towards the purchase cost.

The purchase of this areas now safeguards the area for the future, and management will be of high priority to maintain its wildlife interests, possibly through seasonal grazing and ditch maintenance.

Alan MacPherson-Fletcher, the owner of Balavil, said: "I am delighted that this superb site will continue to be well-managed. I was keen that it should go to an organisation which would conserve and improve its wildlife and landscape value".

Scottish Office cuts cash for conservation

The Scottish Office has decided to prevent the environmental agency, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), from helping conservation bodies buy land in Scotland. Sir Hector Munro, the minister responsible, has made it clear that SNH can no longer provide cash to organisations like the National Trust for Scotland, the RSPB, the John Muir Trust and the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) for the purpose of buying land for conservation.

The RSPB bought the Abernethy estate in 1988 for £1.8m - of which the SNH's predecessor provided £500,000. Since then, they have managed to regenerate the Caledonian pine forest. "Without the money from SNH, it would have been doubtful whether we would have got Abernethy" says John Hunt of RSPB.

The SWT and John Muir Trust have also said that financial help from government is essential to their plans to purchase and manage important habitats.

The Scottish Office policy is that the job of SNH is to seek management agreements and not to fund purchases. The agency pays landowners a grant for coming to an agreement over the way properties are managed.

Greenshank *Jim Young*

The issue is bound to be seen as a government backlash to this year's controversy over the sale of Glenfeshie estate in the Cairngorms. Conservationists asked for government support in a joint JMT/RSPB bid for the estate but none was forthcoming. National Heritage Memorial Fund money was also withheld and the bid fell through allowing the private trust Will Woodlands, based in London, to buy the property.

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay - Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist - almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodland garden of Colonsay House.

Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (21/2 hour passage). Demi-pension from £60.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £140.00 weekly.

On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke - £16.00 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

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N.B. Booklet @ £3.50 inc. p&p describes the island's birds - 66pp plus 8pp colour photos.

Going Dutch - SOC Stirling branch trip to Holland

On 14th May 1994 12 SOC members from Stirling and 2 from Fife set off on a week long trip to Holland. Arriving in Hull shortly after 16.00 hrs we were soon aboard the North Sea Ferries Dutch crewed 'Norsun". A fairly uneventful sea crossing followed with very little sea watching taking place, although a number of Gannets were seen plunge diving by observant diners. Birding began in ernest at Rotterdam Harbour, with the 'better' sightings being of Common Terns and Little Gull being spotted. Having docked we were soon reunited with our coach and headed off to the Naardermeer reserve some 10 miles south east of Amsterdam. Abut this time the penny was starting to drop that our driver was perhaps not as familiar with Dutch topography as I had been led to believe and, consequently, followed one or two interesting diversions among the back roads and waters, which gave ample opportunity to practice the art of three point turning, we arrived at the reserve an hour late andsomewhat shell shocked.

The Naardermeer is owned by the Society for the Preservation of Nature in the Netherlands - 'Natuurmonumenten'. It was purchased in 1906 as a reaction against proposals that it should be used as a refuse dump by the city of Amsterdam (eat your heart out Kinneil). It covers 950ha in total, 700ha being a dyke enclosed lake, the northern most of a chain of shallow lakes and marshes east of the River Vecht. It contains open water, bog, reedbeds, haymeadows and woody areas. Here we met our guide Leo, a budget manager with the Dutch Broadcasting Company at Hilversum, who escorts people around the reserve at weekends. His knowledge was good as his English and he was also the recipient of one or two admiring glances from some female members of the party.

Leo proposed to row us around the lake but since we were late, we walked a few hundred yards along the shore and met up again among the reeds, thus cutting the time required to tour the reserve. Here, a particular word of appreciation for Mhairi & Alastair Simpson who stayed behind since our boat had shown a reluctance to free itself from the muddy bottom when fully loaded. The three hours that followed were among the most memorable of the whole week as we drifted silently with Marsh Harriers floating over the reedbeds, Black Terns flitting by our boat as we passed their nesting rafts, Goshawks streaking over the woods in hot pursuit of lunch, and Hobbies hawking dragonflies overhead which they consumed on the wing much to our delight. All the while a cacophony of Warbler song invaded our ears with, Blackcap, Marsh, Sedge, Reed, Great Reed, Grasshopper, Savis, Willow and Chiffchaff being identified. In the centre of the reserve we walked into a secluded hide which gave outstanding views of Cormorants (2000 pairs on the reserve) nesting almost within touching distance of our vantage point. Water lilies, unfortunately not yet flowering, were everywhere but the first yellow flag irises were in bloom. Alder trees were common and we were shown a rare fresh water sponge. We learned that the Spoonbills had left the Naardermeer five years ago as a result of fox predation and had moved to Flevoland. Another interesting fact to emerge was that the Dutch Electricity Board had lowered a 700m stretch of wires where a line of power pylons cross the flight path between the Cormorant nests on the reserve and their main fishing grounds on the Markermeer/Ijsselmeer, thus drastically cutting the numbers of birds killed and injured as a result of aerial collisions with cables (See Iain English's articles in SBN 22).

Late afternoon saw our arrival at Den Helder for the 25 minute ferry crossing to Texel, followed by a short drive to the centrally situated De Waal, a picturesque and quiet little village. Our accommodation, the Hotel Rebecca run by Mr & Mrs Plaatsman proved to be both pleasant and comfortable. That evening we boarded the bus and, with Mr Plaatsman, a keen birder, and his daughter as our guides, we set off on a short tour of the birdlife, history and topography of Texel. Memorable birds were our first Spoonbills, nesting Black-tailed Godwit, a super black ruffed Ruff and Avocets. The curious wedge shaped wool barns of Texel were pointed out as was the ultra modern Texel fishing fleet in the harbour at Oudeschild.

The next day, although dry, was grey and overcast as we set out to visit Ecomare, the environmental centre for the Wadden and North Seas. Since we had arranged an excursion for later that morning we felt there was insufficient time for a detailed look around and we retired to the car park and surrounding dunes for a spot of birding. An hour with the binoculars added amongst others, Lesser Whitethroat, Whitethroat,

Some of the members of Stirling branches holiday to Holland *Ian Wilson*

Stonechat, Linnet, Cuckoo and splendid views of several Hen Harriers at close quarters.

At 11.00hrs we met our guide from the Dutch Forest Service (Staatsbosbeheer), looking extremely dapper in a green serge suit and feathered hat and not at all like the regulation beardies we are so used to. For several minutes our party was struck dumb as we stood by his wooden hut in the dunes and listened to the beautiful sound of a Nightingale in full song. I will ignore the malicious rumour broadcast by some cynics that it was a tape recording. Unfortunately our guide's English was not too good, but, just as we started to struggle, Rene Jones stole the show when her hitherto undisclosed Dutch linguistic skills came bursting to the surface. The tidal inlet known as De Slufter was formed when fierce storms battered holes in three places in the west coast dune system. Two were subsequently filled but the third has remained open. It covers an area of 455ha and is a long narrow plain intersected by creeks that are open to the sea. Our tour took in nests of Eider, Curlew and Oystercatcher and provided good views of Spoonbill, Marsh Harrier and Short-eared Owl with seemingly every bush having a singing Whitethroat in residence. The highlight was a stunning line up of summer plumaged Black-tailed Godwits, Grey Plovers and Dunlin shining on a mud spit in the newly emerging sun. We then headed south to De Geul where we had excellent views of a most obliging Long-eared Owl. In the evening a diminished crew of hardy individuals boarded the bus and again visited the harbour at Oudeschild where the fishing fleet had been replaced by some splendid sail training ships. A short drive north up the east coast rounded off the day nicely with nesting Little Terns and Avocets and our first Yellow Wagtail *(Flava)*.

Tuesday dawned grey and wet but it had not silenced the Icterine Warbler outside our bedroom window. Arrangements had been made for a tour of the Natuurmonumenten managed reserve 'De Schorren' which borders the Wadden Sea. At 09.00 we met our guide, Mr Boet, and his expression quickly told us the tour was off. We agreed to reconvene at 14.00 and continued on to De Eyerlandse Duinen in the north, where one or two braved the driving rain before returning drookit to the bus. The southern tip of Vlieland, the next island to the north in the south Friesian chain, could just be seen through the grey mirk. On the return south we passed a party of two dozen Bar-tailed Godwits, the males looking extremely handsome in their red summer plumages. We returned to Ecomare for a leisurely exploration of the centre. The exhibition featured the changing coastline and land use of the island over the centuries. There were birdlife exhibits and specimens, impressive aquaria, as well as oiled and injured bird and seal recovery units, the bird units containing Guillemots and Gannets awaiting release. Lunch was taken near a rough pasture swathed in a purple profusion of broad leafed orchids, overlooking a small pool containing 2 Reeve, a Wood Sandpiper, Redshank and Shoveler. Overnight there appeared to have been a fall of blue-headed wagtails, they were much in evidence around the bus as we ate.

Miraculously at 14.00hrs the rain stopped, the sun came out and we set off north along the east dyke with our guide. He was pleasant, informative and with excellent English imparted much information. e.g. The tidal rise and fall was only 1 metre, and at high tide you could walk out for 4km and the water wouldn't come above your knees. At low tide one could walk 10km over the mud before reaching the sea. Marsh Harriers were hunting over the saltings, and great rafts of Eiders bobbed on the water. Towards the end of our walk we looked west from our vantage point on the dyke down on to the Society owned pastures where several thousand Brent Geese grazed in preparation for their imminent departure north to the Arctic tundra (in winter numbers peak at 10,000).

Next day we visited Flevoland. Flevoland is the Netherlands newest province reclaimed from the Zuiderzee, In recent years the area has established small breeding populations of Spotted Crake, Penduline Tit and Scarlet Rosefinch. It has also acted as an important 'reservoir'. assisting the spread of several species to suitable sites in Holland while also providing the source of East Anglia's expanding Bearded Tit and Marsh Harrier populations.

As we left the bus on Flevoland for the first hide 'De Grauwe Gans' a Nightingale was giving it big licks from the woods 50m away. The walk in through high reed beds was superb and all ears strained attempting to identify the Acrocephalus Warblers around us. Extra brownie points went to Sylvia and Mhairi who spotted the first Bluethroat (white spotted) of the trip, a superb male that obligingly posed at the top of a reed stem. A small island in front of the hide gave good view of nesting Avocets and Little Ringed Plovers. Our circular path back to the bus brought more Bluethroats, Bearded and Marsh Tits.

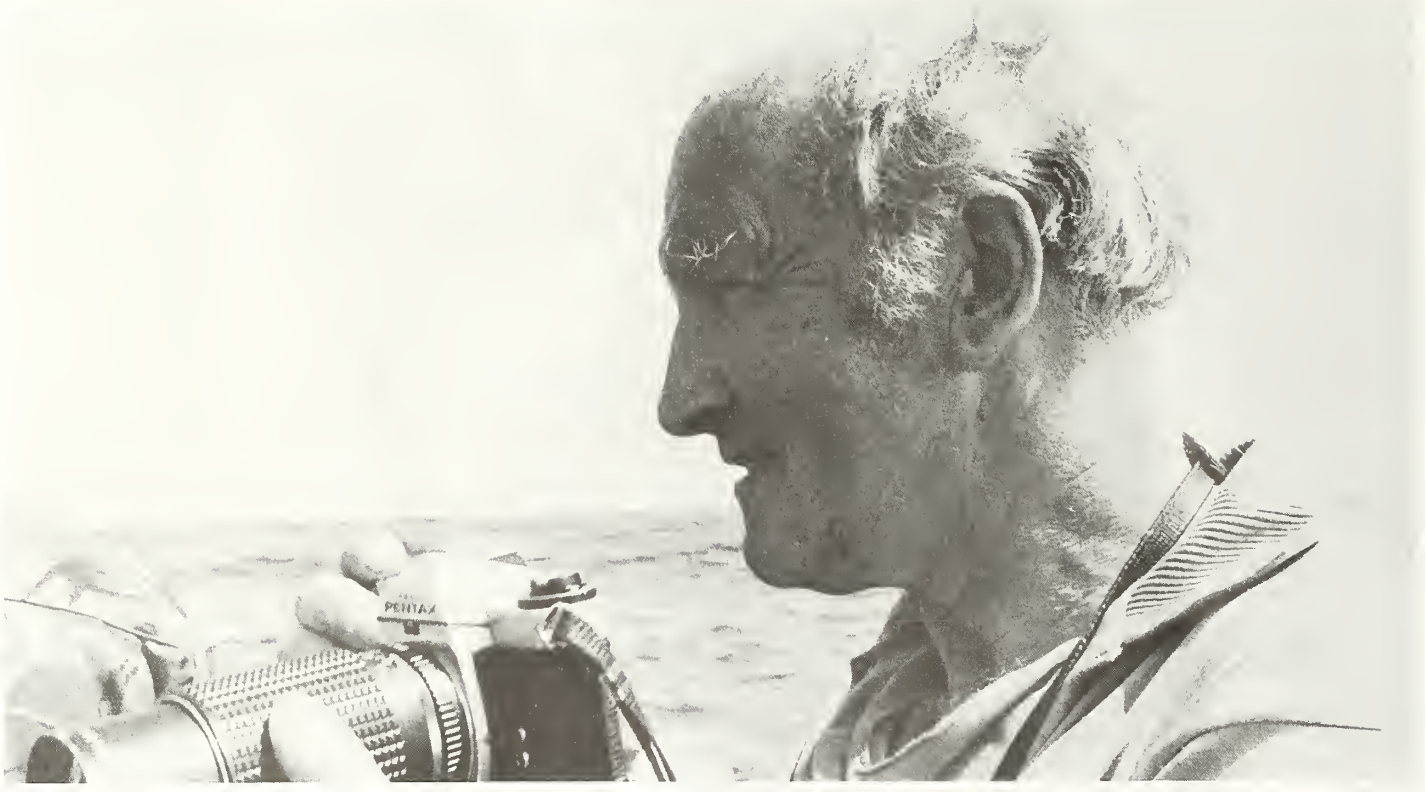
On the principal of saving the best to last, we had arranged a tour of the Staatsbosbeheer managed reserve, De Muy, for our final morning and we met our guide Dingerman Inghoef at 11.00hrs. Dingerman turned out to be a warden of a more familiar type (no beard), exceptionally good English, very knowledgeable on both fauna and flora. The reserve was an absolute gem, 1,000 acres of lake, dunes, grassland meadows and woodland. As we set off we watched a Hobby overhead, one from the 4 or 5 pairs that nested on the reserve. He showed us Green Winged and Early Purple Orchids (2 of the 8 species on the reserve). The State pays between 50 and 60,000 guilders a year in a set aside type agreement that allows management control for optimum wildflower and wildlife benefit. As we left the meadows and moved into the dunes, Cinnabar Moths and their caterpillars appeared underfoot. Birds on show included nesting Marsh Harriers, Hobby, Spoonbills, Turtle Dove, Nightingales, and a plethora of Warblers. Dingerman told us that the previous week Osprey, Honey Buzzard and Red-footed Falcon has passed through and, if we returned in another couple of weeks, his summering Red Backed Shrikes and Scarlet Rosefinch would be in residence.

That evening the systematic list was produced and after one or two stewards enquiries we agreed on a total of 118 species seen by the party in Holland thus far, and counting.

The next morning we headed for the ferry and, again, were on the 09.05., watching the Terns and feeding Gulls, our destination being the lake at Nieuwkoop. In a nearby meadow we stopped to see two storks making a good living amongst the freshly cut grass. On we went for a few more miles with every patch of the plentiful water around us holding Great Crested Grebe, Moorhen, Coot, Mallard and Grey Heron. We managed to pull over onto a small level area beside the road for our lunch stop, and had no sooner come to rest than Heather Walshaw queried a heron in a nearby ditch. I could not understand her surprise since I had been telling her constantly that this was the spot for Purple Heron '100% guaranteed'!

Late afternoon saw our return to Rotterdam in time to catch the British crewed 'Norsea'. By Saturday we were back, tired but satisfied with a final total of 120 bird species seen in Holland.

Ian Wilson.



The late Jim Young, with camera at the ready. As a tribute to Jim this issue of SBN contains as many of Jims photographs as possible. He will be sadly missed by all who knew him.

Brian Turner

Obituary

James F Young

- Jim to all who knew him died peacefully on 17th August 1994, at Dumfries Royal Infirmary. The SOC was represented at his funeral by Donald Watson.

Jim was born into an established farming family at Beuchan near Keir village, moved into the adjacent farm of Waterside Mains farm in 1954. He was a dedicated and respected farmer, in his formative years he spent what spare time and holidays the farm permitted in looking after his beehives, fishing for trout in the local burn and watching birds and wildlife on the farm. He took particular delight in a large colony of House Martins which nested in an open sided barn, hat stacking was never allowed to disturb the birds.

Initially a somewhat shy, reserved man, his membership of the SOC literally changed his quiet rural life in a dramatic way. He was a founder member of the Dumfries branch of the Club and rarely missed a meeting or outing. He served on the committee and graced all subsequent members' nights by showing some of his remarkable wildlife pictures. He met a new circle of people, including some would say, a few reprobates. Jim was introduced to goose and wader watching on the Solway, raptors and seabirds in Galloway and his first taste of alcohol after which he diagnosed himself as *"gey no weel"*. These were glorious, exciting days with excursions to Norfolk, Islay, Aviemore and to the Isle of May, invariably organised by Bobby Smith and thus they had elements of serious birding, fun and chaos all thrown in. Jim went on the first SOC island cruise around Scotland, memories of which he often recounted.

Jim was also one of the founder members of the North Solway Ringing Group and aided by his close friend John McCubbin became its first secretary, a formidable task which they performed admirably considering that the group was the first of its type in Scotland and the first to commence significant cannon netting. He was notably involved in other large sale ringing efforts of geese, waders, gulls, gannets and of course raptors. His farm was one of the first BTO common bird census plots in Scotland and he played an active part in both local schemes to count wildfowl, waders and rooks and also in national surveys and atlas work.

Jim increasingly gravitated towards spending most of his leisure hours devoted to bird photography, firstly concentrating and learning his trade with the birds on his farm followed by photographic sorties to Shetland and other meccas in Scotland. With Bobby Smith and later Brian Turner he ventured further afield to many parts of Europe, Africa and India. He became a most gifted photographer and has had many of his photographs published in books, magazines and periodicals. In one book alone over 100 of his photographs were used as illustrations. Countless other photographs he gifted to organisations and individuals to illustrate articles and lectures. Generous with his time he showed his pictures to a wide audience from his local church guild and rural to national conferences.

Outwith Dumfries-shire Jim will be remembered best for the quality of his photography. Those of us who were privileged to know him more intimately will recall his quiet dignified manner, dry humour and kindness and will reflect on his many undoubted talents. The SOC, and Dumfries branch in particular, have lost an influential member and friend who will be sorely missed. He was never known to speak ill of anyone and went through life without making a single enemy - "a country gentleman".

John G Young. SNH.

A Tribute to Jim Young whose photos will enhance SBN for many years to come.

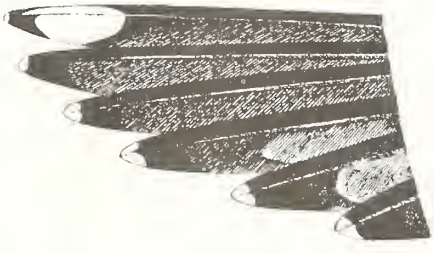
House Martin collecting mud

Male Short-eared Owl presenting a female incubating eggs with a vole

Broken Promises

The long-awaited consultation paper on the future of Forest Enterprise was published in August 1994, and has been condemned by the RSPB.

Forest Enterprise owns 1.2 million hectares - which includes almost half of Britain's forests. The paper's failure to examine the aims and priorities of the new agency, has been criticised by the RSPB. The paper does not offer the consultation as promised by Ministers, and the key issues of the overall purpose and priorities of the organisation seem to have already been decided. The Framework Document - which sets out the structure and targets for the new agency may not be influenced by consultation. The paper talks about multipurpose objectives for forestry, but requires only the setting of financial targets. The RSPB considers it essential that quantified environmental as well as financial targets are set for the new agency, and that environmental targets be given as high a priority as financial targets. Without this the opportunity for the agency to protect and improve the conservation value of our forests could be jeopardised in return for higher monetary returns.



SOC members Intimations

Ken Anderson, who died early in September, had a long association with the Stirling Branch. A founder member, and its third Chairman, he was delighted that in his eightieth year he had still been able to take an active and quite strenuous part in the Branch's recent expedition to Holland, only a month or two before his death. Ken combined two enthusiasms that often go together, ornithology and photography, but unlike the majority in whom an interest in birds leads to a desire to photograph them, Ken was already an experienced photographer before he became seriously interested in birds, and many local organisations and club have enjoyed his talks illustrated by his own excellent slides. He will be greatly missed by a wide circle of friends.

George Jamieson

Corncrake *RSPB*

Corncrakes in danger

The most endangered bird in Britain is now only found on a few of the smaller Scottish Islands. Calling male Corncrakes in Britain have fallen from about 3,000 in 1968 to only 488 in 1993. For the first time ever there were no calling Corncrakes in Northern Ireland, although hope there is still hope from two Hebridean islands where numbers have recently increased.

On the island of Coll were the RSPB bought a reserve in 1991, the number of calling male Corncrakes has increased from 5 in 1991 to 18 in 1994. On Tiree, were similar methods of crofting have been used numbers has also increased between 1988 and 1994 when 126 birds were reported.

Current initiatives to help the Corncrake are funded by both the RSPB, the Government and the European Union but for these to be more effective greater funding is needed to secure a future for these now rare birds. The appeal from the RSPB is being launched to enable the Society to: encourage crofters in the Hebrides to help Corncrakes to breed in safety through the creation of tall vegetation, delay mowing times and use safer mowing methods; such as cutting in a Corncrake friendly manner: continue research and monitoring of Corncrake to find out more about their needs and habits; and undertake Corncrake management measures on suitable RSPB reserves.

"If the Corncrake can be saved in Britain, then similar declines in other countries can hopefully be halted". The early results from work on Coll and Tiree has given a ray of hope for this species but more effort and funding are essential if this bird is not to become extinct in Britain as it already has in Northern Ireland.

The Corncrake was once widespread throughout Britain and Ireland, but a marked decrease began towards the end of the 19th century. Between 1988 and 1993 Corncrake numbers in Britain fell by about 20%, and in Ireland by c80%. Work to help the Corncrake has already started in Britain, Ireland and France and is financially supported by the EU LIFE programme, with assistance from the UK, Irish and French Governments.

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REVIEWS

Books received and added to the Waterston Library.

Field Guide to Birds of Britain & Europe. by Paul Sterry.This excellent little identification guide has no less than 720 colour photographs illustrating it. *The Crowood Press. £9.99. ISBN 1-85223-793-7*

Birds of Britain & Europe. by J. Nicolai, D. Singer & K. Wothe. Another excellent guide by Collin. The book is illustrated with high quality photographs and runs to 250 pp. *Collins. £6.99. ISBN 0-00-219995-5*
Collins Gem Birds Photoguide. A useful little book for the beginner. *Collins. £3.50. ISBN 0-00-47-544-0.*

Scottish Birds. by Valerie Thom. This Collins guide is a must the for the beginner, and is divided into habitats rather than the normal Voous order. 256pp. *Collins. £7.99. ISBN 0-00-219983-1.*

Hamlyn Species and Behaviour Guides. Another two books in this very good series, The Swallow by Angela Turner. 128pp. *£9.99. ISBN 0-600-57979-4.*, and Waders by Nicholas Hammond & Bruce Pearson. 174pp. *£14.99. ISBN 0-600-57974-3.*

Hamlyn Birdwatching Guides. -Where to Watch Birds in Eastern Europe by Gerard Gorman. Published in association with BirdLife International. 214pp. *£16.99. ISBN 0-600-57976-X.*
Where to Watch Birds in Britain & Europe by John Gooders. 262pp. *£12.99. ISBN 0-600-58007-5.*

Where to watch birds in South America by Nigel Wheatley. Published by Helm, 429pp. *£14.99. ISBN 0-7136-3909-1.*

Birdwatcher's Yearbook and diary for 1995. by John Pemberton. This book contains all the usual useful information for birdwatchers around Britain. 320pp. *£12.00. ISBN 0-9514965-5-7.*

The Upland Goose by R.W. Summers and J.H. McAdam. A study of interactin between geese, sheep and man in the Falkland Islands. 162pp. Illustrated with numerous figures, drawings and halftones. *£12.95. available from Dr J McAdam, Dept of Agric. Botany, Agric & Food Science Research Centre, Newforge Lane, Belfast BT9 5PX.*

The Birds of Nigeria by J.H. Elgood, *et al.* The 2nd edition of the BOU checklist. 306pp. Available from BOU, c/o The Natural History Museum, Akeman St, Tring, Herts HP23 6AP. *£21.00 (UK); £23.00 (overseas).*

SOC NOTICES

Bewick and Whooper Swans

As part of an International study a number of Bewick's and Whooper Swans have been marked with neck collars, and a request has been made for information on any sightings of these birds.

Bewick and Whooper Swans are currently being ringed at several places along their migratory flyways. These studies are aimed at unravelling migratory routes, time schedules and studies of individual breeding successes.

The Dutch and in particular British studies on Bewick Swans have been conducted for many years, mainly on the wintering grounds. Until 7 years ago all birds were ringed in the conventional manner with leg rings, however as part of the international work scientists from Holland, Britain, Russia, Denmark and Estonian are now using neck collars at several places along the migratory routes and on the Siberian breeding grounds.

Whooper Swans have until a few years ago been considered as two almost discrete populations. The Icelandic breeding population which winters in Britain and Ireland, and the Continental population breeding in Scandinavia and Russia, whilst wintering in continental parts of northwest Europe. Observations of Icelandic ringed birds imply that, at least some of the east Iceland population winter in Denmark. Until now birds from Iceland have been mainly ringed in the conventional manner, thus causing difficulty in reading these rings in the Danish and Norwegian wintering grounds. During a joint expedition to east Iceland by Icelandic/Danish ornithologists in August 1994 200 birds were marked with neck collars. The aim of this project is to establish how high a proportion of east Icelandic Whooper Swans winter in continental Europe. Birds are expected to be seen in all countries bordering the North Sea, with the British ones mainly in Scotland.

Scottish ornithologists are asked to look out for birds with yellow neck collars with black lettering on them. The neck collars can be read with a telescope from a distance of about 800/900 metres.

Please send information on neck collar number, locality, date, type of habitat, no of cygnets, pairs, and any information on family relations between marked and unmarked birds, number of birds in flock etc., to:- National Environmental Research Institute, Dept. of Wildlife Ecology, att. Bjarke Laubek, Røndevej 12, Kalø, 8410 Rønde, Denmark.

In order to speed up reports of birds sighted by you and in order to avoid mistakes, please send all information on Whooper Swans with neck collars directly to Denmark. Each observer gets details about ringing data and other sightings of the birds reported. Sightings of leg ringed Whooper and Bewick's are still to be sent to the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge, Gloucester.

Changes at No 21.

Michael Murphy moved to the USA in October we thank him for his contribution and wish him well in his new habitat. As members who attended the North Berwick conference will know that nearer home Sylvia Laing is now the club secretary, and Pamela Black a long standing SOC member from Edinburgh is assisting the secretary on a part time basis.

Funds for Conservation Projects

BirdLife International and the Fauna and Flora Preservation Society, with support from British Petroleum, hold an annual competition for conservation exploration projects. Projects entering the competition are judged especially on the level of host country involvement and the global importance of the conservation issues on which the project is focused. Proposals for 1995 expeditions must be entered no later than 31st December 1994.

For further information contact **Michael K Poulson, BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA.**

Holiday Accommodation

Caravan, Pease Bay, 2 miles south of Dunbar. Beautiful beach side location in Scottish Borders, birdwatching, hill walking (adjacent Southern Upland Way), wind surfing. Sleeps 6, toilet, shower, full kitchen. Shop and restaurant on site. From £150 per week. Weekend bookings available. Tel. 0131 552 4393.

Look out for Goosanders!

10 Goosanders have been given a pink wing tag on the left wing on the Eden Estuary, Fife in August 1994. In addition a single male Red-breasted Merganser was tagged on the right wing with a blue tag. Records of any of these birds or of Goosanders tagged in previous years with blue (1992) or red (1993) tags on their left wings would be very much appreciated. They have been tagged by the Tay Ringing Group on behalf of Dr Mick Marquiss of the Institute of Terrestial Ecology. Any sightings should be reported to **Les Hatton, North East Fife Ringer Service, Craigtoun Country Park, St. Andrews, Fife KY16 8NX; Tel. 0334 472151** All records will be acknowledged.

Wing-tagged Red Kites released in Scotland

All Red Kites released in Scotland as part of the joint JNCC/RSPB reintroduction project have been fitted with wing tags. The tags are not necessarily the same on each wing. (See SBN 33 & 34 for illustrated details of tags). Please contact **Lorcan O'Toole** with any sighting however incomplete at **RSPB, North Scotland Office, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW., tel 0463 715000** as soon as possible so that sightings can be followed up.

Colour ringed Ring Ouzels

A study by David Arthur of Ring Ouzels in Glen Esk, Angus is now in its third year. A number of birds have been individually colour ringed, and any sightings of colour ringed Ring Ouzels will be greatly appreciated by David. Please contact **David Arthur, 12 Dundee Street, Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7PD. 0241 853356.** All sightings will be acknowledged.

Wing-tagged Hen Harriers

Marked birds are carrying a coloured tag on each wing. Although the colour on each wing may be different a single letter or number is repeated on each tag. Details of any sightings however incomplete should be sent to **Brian Etheridge, RSPB North Scotland Office, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW tel 0463 715000** as soon as possible.

200 Club

Winners in the third quarter of 1994 were:-

July 1st. £30 - R.S. Craig, Peebles; 2nd. £20 - Mrs J.D. Watson, St John's Town of Dalry; 3rd. £10 - Dr E Tennant, Glasgow. **August** 1st. £30 - Miss J.R. Davidson, Edinburgh; 2nd. £20 - J. Walker, Leeds; 3rd. £10 - Mrs R. Cowper, Edinburgh. **September** 1st. £30 - T.D. Dobson, Galashiels; 2nd. £20 - Mr & Mrs D. Johnston, Troon; 3rd. £10 - Miss E.M. Lapthorn, Dunblane.

If you are a new member of the SOC, and over 18, and would like to join the 200 Club, you will be very welcome, and so too will be SOC members of longer standing. Current members will know that over £1,000 is raised each year for refurbishment of 21 Regent Terrace, which is a great help to SOC funds, and another £1,000+ is given back to 200 Club members by way of monthly prizes varying from £100 to £10. If you would like more details about joining please write to me at: **Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL (tel 0896 82 2176)**

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe.

Colour-ringed Stonechats

Over the past four years, approximately 200 birds (mainly pulli) have been colour-ringed at both inland and coastal sites in the Aberdeen area.

Evidence suggests that young birds can disperse over considerable distances and I would therefore by very grateful for details of any sightings in Scotland. Note should be maide of the colour comination, and which leg bears the metal and which the colour rings. All sightings will be acknowledged. **Andy Thorpe, 15 Albyn Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 1YP.**

Stirling Branch Meetings

Financial considerations have determined a change of venue for Stirling Branch meetings. Beginning **12 January 1995,** evening talks will be in **St Saviour's Church Hall, Keir Street, Bridge of Allan.**

SOC Stirling Branch

The SOC Stirling branch Argyll weekend has been changed from 31st March/2nd April to **24th/26th March.** The venue remains the same.

SOC Lothian Branch Discussion Group

Members may be interested to know that there is an additional monthly meeting arranged by the Lothian Branch : the "Discussion Group". This will particularly be of interest to members keen on fieldwork or conservation matters. The meetings are held at 21 Regent Terrace in Edinburgh, so clearly this will not be convenient for many members, but all visiting members as well as more local members are very welcome to attend. We have in the past few years had visitors from Shetland and Glasgow. The meetings occur on the first Wednesday of each month from September to April at 7.30pm in the SOC Library.

The "fieldwork" discussed includes organised studies such as BTO surveys, wildfowl and wader counts, goose roost counts, ringing, raptor studies, atlas work and local surveys organised by the branch or individuals. This is an informal meeting covering recent or forthcoming surveys and items of local or national conservation interest. For anyone interesting in becoming more involved in surveys, it is an ideal opportunity to find out more.

There is usually time to mention recent bird sightings, and always time for a cup of tea and a cake brought by members of the group. Occasionally, other people active in areas of interest to the group are invited to lead a discussion. Recently we have met RSPB conservation officers and survey organisers, and representatives from FWAG and from WWT.

If you are already an active fieldworker, or would like to become more active, then please join us. The dates of the first meetings this autumn are 7th September, 5th October, 2nd November and 7th December. If you would like further information, then please contact the **Chairman, Mark Holling on 0578-760239.**

Rarity Descriptions

It is very helpful if all observers of rarities send in their descriptions (preferably to the relevant county or regional recorder) as soon as possible after the sighting. It will speed up the decision-making process if notes on all major autumn rarities are submitted by mid November at the latest. **Please do not wait until January.** Thank you.

M J Rogers, Secretary BBRC.

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and Stan da Prato

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St Kilda Gannet Census

Why does counting Gannets exert such a fascination for ornithologists? James Fisher and Gwynne Vevers provided an answer in the introduction to the 1939 census by acknowledging that interest had been "largely aroused, and wholly maintained, by the beauty of this great seabird, and the romance of its surroundings". They were also struck by the enthusiasm of other people taking part in the survey. These sentiments seem just as strong 55 years later as the latest Gannet census gets underway.

In the east Atlantic, the present breeding distribution of the Gannet extends from Syltefjordstauran in north Norway to Rouzic in the Sept Isles off the Brittany coast. However, the Gannet's stronghold is undeniably Scotland where there are currently twelve colonies. The status of the thirteenth "colony" on Rockall, where a single pair bred in 192 was not, as far as we know, checked in 1994. Our aim last summer was to census the world's largest gannetry on St Kilda and the venture was supported by a generous grant from the SOC.

Counting anything on St Kilda is a Herculean task, first because of the remoteness of the archipelago and second because of the appalling weather conditions which often prevail. We decided that an aerial survey offered the best chance of success and, on 15th May 1994 with a favourable weather forecast, we took off from Inverness airport to attempt a count. Conditions were almost perfect as the islands came into view but there was no time to admire the scenery. Making sure that you have complete photographic coverage of a colony that is as complicated as the one on St Kilda requires enormous concentration as you fill in each piece of the mental jigsaw!! The main gannetry is on the island of Boreray where the birds breed in amongst a bewildering maze of pinnacles, buttresses and overhangs from sea level to near the summit at 1200 feet. Boreray's two satellite stacs - Stac Lee and Stac an Armin - also hold substantial numbers of Gannets and their cliff faces are covered in a dense mass of white spots.

Gannet *Brian Turner*

In the course of the survey we took over 500 colour slides. There then followed two nerve-wracking weeks waiting for the films to come back from processing. Not surprisingly many slides were out of focus, over exposed, too distant or were of the back of someone's head or the plane's wing, but fortunately there were enough left to provide coverage of 99% of the colony and "the missing bit" was photographed from the sea later in the season. To count all the "little white dots" was a mind blowing experience which took four days - but no wonder when the grand total came to 60,428 occupied sites!! This represented a 21% increase over the last count in 1985. While some of this was probably due to greater aerial coverage and higher standard of photographs in 1994, increases on the stacs and some parts of Boreray were undoubtedly genuine.

We are still waiting for totals for some Scottish colonies and others will be counted in 1995. However, to judge from the available data, numbers are still increasing at most Scottish gannetries with rates generally being higher at the most recently established colonies. As far as we can tell there is no sign of the sustained increase in the Gannet population, which has occurred throughout this century, coming to an end.

The St Kilda survey was a partnership project and in addition to support from the SOC contributions were also received from SNH, JNCC, BTO, the Seabird Group and RSPB. The success of the project was due to the flying skills of Alan Mossman of Air Alba and back-up photography by Mary Harman, Digger Jackson, Kenny Taylor and Jim Vaughan. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those who counted other gannetries last summer.

Sarah Wanless and Stuart Murray

Scottish Crossbill on nest *David Whitaker Forestry Commission*

Scottish Crossbill moves between Deeside and Strathspey

At the Scottish Ringers Conference in November 1994, Robert Rae asked people to look closely at any crossbills they saw because we (RR & MM) had colour-ringed birds on Upper Deeside. In early December, I (MM) received a note from Robert Proctor with details of colour rings on a bird seen on 4th December, at the RSPB Abernethy Reserve on Speyside. My first reaction was one of incredulity, rapidly replaced by dark suspicion. RR was in Singapore on business and RP was away on a course. There was a strong smell of a classic Grampian Ringing Group 'wind up'. Was this some perverted Christmas hoax? A quick phone call to Des Dugan, the RSPB warden, allayed my fears - a colour-ringed crossbill had been seen.

Paul Harvey had stopped off en route from Shetland to Edinburgh, especially to see some typical highland birds. A walk along the shore at Burghead had been disappointing - no sign of Capercaillie or Crested Tit - merely a spotty, grey wader with yellow legs and a crowd of happy, smiling people. Devastated (but not one to give up easily) he moved on to upper Speyside, to the RSPB Abernethy Reserve where his perseverence was rewarded with views of Capercaillie, Crested Tit and crossbills. But what sort of crossbills? They seemed to have large bills but as his colleague (RP) pointed out (Proctor, R & Fairhurst, D 1993, "The Scottish Crossbill problem", identification forum, Birding World 4:349-352) were they Scottish Crossbills or merely Parrot Crossbills? Luckily one of them, a male, had colour rings - here was a bird whose biometrics were surely recorded. I looked up the bird's details. When it was caught the bird had a bill depth measurement of 12.1 mm, too large for a Common Crossbill and much smaller than we might expect for a Parrot Crossbill. This was as near to a Scottish Crossbill as one can expect these days.

The bird had been caught, measured and ringed near Ballater, on Upper Deeside on the 21st March 1993. It was a male with no traces of juvenile plumage in the wing, so was probably over a year old then. It had been seen subsequently in the same wood twice in April and was seen feeding recently fledged young in June. It was seen there on 13th July but not thereafter, despite our continued monitoring of the area in the following winter, and in spring and summer 1994. The bird could have moved to Speyside in autumn 1993, or in spring or autumn 1994. Its resighting at Abernethy represents a movement of about 40 km north west. We have recorded three other colour-ringed Scottish Crossbills moving up to 14 km within Deeside, two of them from Ballater up the valley, so the Speyside bird could well have travelled up Deeside and over the Cairngorms range. There are occasional records of crossbills from Cairn Gorm (Dave Pullan, "Migrants and vagrants on the Cairngorm plateau", Moray and Nairn Bird Report 1993). Alternatively the bird may have skirted the mountains through Donside.

This single record is important. It is the first documented movement of Scottish Crossbill between the Cairngorm Straths. In the absence of any data on movement, merely because of the lack of records outside its highland range, the Scottish Crossbill is said to be sedentary compared with 'nomadic' Common Crossbills. However, on the basis of local population fluctuations, Nethersole-Thompson ("Pine Crossbills" 1975) argued that they must move between Strathspey and Deeside to exploit pine seed crops which may fluctuate asynchronously between glens. It was not obvious why the present bird should move so far because there was apparently plenty of pine seed in the Ballater area, but here at least is the first proof of such a movement. Post juvenile dispersal can be ruled out because the bird was an adult that had apparently bred successfully prior to the move. Our studies of crossbills will continue but with new horizons because the birds are obviously not strictly resident. We need no longer entertain the idea of Scottish Crossbills living in small fragments of habitat, as potentially isolated populations vulnerable to changing local conditions. Rather we must think of them as part of a larger, more widespread population able to exploit whatever habitat remains irrespective of its peicemeal status.

Nevertheless we cannot be complacent because the Scottish Crossbill is our only endemic bird species, and for a passerine

its population is relatively small. In "Birds in Europe - Their Conservation Status" (Tucker & Heath 1994) the Scottish Crossbill is one of only two British species listed as of global conservation concern (the other is Corncrake). The text categorises the species' "European Threat Status" as "Insufficiently Known" because Scottish Crossbills are not adequately monitored, the current geographical range is uncertain and their abundance unknown. This situation arises because crossbills are difficult to identify in the field and, like many woodland birds, are difficult to count.

Colour-ringed birds that have been measured are more easily allocated to species, so please look out for them because we need to know a bit more about movements if we are to devise methods to assess status.

Mick Marquiss & Robert Rae (Grampian Ringing Group, 11 Millend, Newburgh, Aberdeenshire), Paul Harvey (Sandwick, Shetland) and Bob Proctor (RSPB, Abernethy).

Congratulations to Bobby Smith

Bobby Smith is no doubt known to many of our members at least by name if not in person. As one of the Dumfries photographic mafia his constant supply of high quality photographs have enhanced many SBN's while many conference goers have enjoyed his colour slides of birds in south west Scotland and, more recently, abroad. However Bobby is also a practical conservationist as befits someone with years of experience working the land. In 1994 he won the prestigious Crown Estates Award for conservation, in his native Dumfriesshire.

On a piece of farmland he once farmed before retiring, Bobby has created a wildlife sanctuary by making a pond, an artificial Sand Martin bank (see SB 17.4) and planting the surrounding area with a hawthorn hedge and various trees. The sanctuary was created with the help of many volunteers from all walks of life, and donations of various pieces of equipment have ensured that all the work has been carried out as efficiently as possible. It is good to see that he has been acknowledged and appreciated by the Crown Estates for the work he has carried out. Look out in an SBN towards the end of 1995 for a report on the 1995 season at Applegarthtown, Dumfriesshire.

In the meantime many congratulations Bobby, keep up the good work.

Sea Eagle success in 1994

During 1994 five young Sea Eagles fledged from nests in Scotland, bringing the total of wild Sea Eagles fledged in Scotland to 39, since the reintroduction began in 1975. A further 10 young birds supplied from Norway were also released in Western Scotland. For the first time since the reintroduction began a pair of Scottish bred Sea Eagles attempted to breed for the first time. Unfortunately although eggs were laid, the pair failed and no young chicks were produced from this nest.

Despite recent successes there are still fewer than 10 territorial pairs in Scotland, and so far only five pairs have successfully raised young. With this poor foothold, the Sea Eagle Project Team, under the chairmanship of Professor George Dunnet, felt it was essential to release more young in order to give the population a more secure future. This year the young Sea Eagles have been fitted with individually marked yellow wing tags to enable identification in the field.

Sea Eagle chick *Laurie Campbell (SNH)*

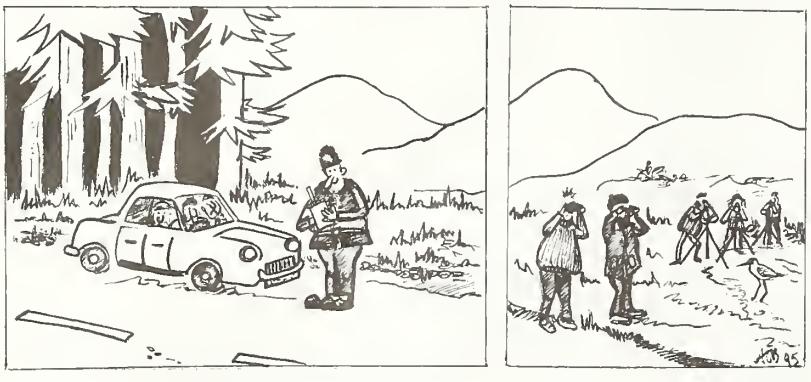
SOC Highland Branch - fame at last!!

On 27 November last year 6 of us met Jeff Stenning of the RSPB Highland office and set off for Findhorn and the Moray coast looking for sea ducks. The first sightings of the day gave no hint of the extreme rarity that awaited us. Flocks of Rooks, skeins of geese, as well as the usual Blackbirds, finches etc. were all predictable. At Findhorn, were the usual ducks, swans, waders, scoters, divers and gulls not to mention seals. One group of Long-tailed Ducks came very close to the shore giving superb views to everyone.

Next stop was Roseisle. A trip through the forest produced a few Bullfinches, then on to the beach for more Scoters, Divers and Long-tailed Ducks, although with the wind picking up the sea ducks were playing hide and seek in the wave troughs.

Lunch was taken at Burghead, watching some brave - or foolhardy? - wind surfers as well as the usual waders and gulls. Then across the Burghead peninsula to the beach behind the maltings. More Long-tails etc., and "What's that bird?" from one or two people looking at a small grey wader with short yellow legs, dabbling in a pool only 20 feet of so from us. Jeff instantly said "Tattler" and excitement, adrenalin and amazement kept out the cold for the next hour or so as we kept watch over this very rare wader from the Far East. It was confirmed by other experts that is was indeed a Grey Tailed Tattler. Even more remarkably the only other British record in 1981 was also found by Jeff!!.

We returned home, feeling very pleased with ourselves. So if you are one of the ninety people caught speeding by police on the A9 on your way to see the Tattler, you now know who to blame!!!!.



90! It'll take more than a Tattler to beat that *Anne O'Brien*

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay - Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist - almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodland garden of Colonsay House.

Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (21/2 hour passage). Demi-pension from £60.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £140.00 weekly.

On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke - £16.00 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

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Where does the Slender-billed Curlew nest?

Following a request by our Russian colleague V.P. Bilik, G. Harper reported in *SBN* last September that the search for nests of these birds in west Siberian forest bogs was a mistake and that the steppe zone between western Kazakhstan and eastern Europe was a more likely habitat.

An analysis of the description of the west Siberian landscape (see Map 110 in the *Physical-Geographic Atlas USSR,* Moscow. , 1966) led me to the conclusion that potential breeding grounds do not necessarily lie in the forest bogs (where Tara and Barnaul, the only two breeding places discovered in the 1920s, are situated), but rather to the north of this zone in the large bogs of the taiga (coniferous forest).

In my opinion, Bilik makes two mistakes: He starts from the assumption that the reduction in the number of Slender-billed Curlews can traced to the breeding grounds. However, it is much more probable that factors along the migration routes and in wintering areas are responsible for the collapse in the population which took place at the turn of the century. Cultivation of the steppe began with Russia's "communist epoch". Bilik maintains that large parts of the steppe have been only marginally explored. This is not the case. A relatively large amount of ornithological data on the steppe of southwest Russia exists. On the other hand, the taiga in this region has hardly been explored!

We must not forget that some of the older literature on the subject contains (unreferenced) allusions to the breeding grounds of the Slender-billed Curlew in the Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece and even on the Balearic Islands! The fact that this bird does not breed in the Balkans or on the Balearic Islands has since been accepted. I presume that the same holds true for the west Siberian steppe zone (for details, see A. Dolgushin, *Birds of Kazakhstan*, 1962, vol. 2, pp. 133-137). For this reason, I propose that the search for nests of the Slender-billed Curlew be vigorously continued in the large bogs of the west Siberian taiga.

E. Nowak

Kissing birds!?

Early in November we were watching a Crested Tit feeding on a low branch of a birch tree at Loch an Eilean when a Blue Tit landed on the same branch and moved towards it. The Crested Tit seemed unconcerned and went on feeding, but as the Blue Tit came closer it looked up, and advanced towards it with something in its beak. The Blue Tit took the proffered morsel and flew off, and the Crested Tit continued to feed, quite unperturbed.

Ten days later, back in Galloway, I was watching a Blue Tit feeding under the nut holders on the patio when a Robin, whose patch it obviously was, landed, and approached provocatively. This procedure was repeated several times, with no response from the lue Tit, until during one confrontation the tit advanced with a piece of peanut in its bill, whereupon the Robin took the offered morsel and flew off.

Have I been unobservant, and not noticed feeding between different species before.

Or perhaps they were just kissing!?

Kenneth Halliday

RSPB buy Forsinard Estate

A 17,600 estate in the Flow Country to the east of Sutherland has been purchased by the RSPB from Fountain International Ltd, formerly Fountain Forestry Ltd. This prime peatland area is the second largest area of land ever purchased by the RSPB in its 105 year history.

The Flow Country, which holds seven Red Data breeding birds, is one of the largest remaining tracts of 'wild land' in western Europe. It is listed as requiring special protection under European conservation law.

During the 1980s the Flow Country was the subject of many heated debates between conservationists and parts of the forestry industry. Tens of thousands of acres have already been ploughed up for forestry, combined with large scale peat extraction some areas of peatland are still under threat.

The RSPB intend to seek an estate manager for Forsinard who will live locally. They also intend to allow both deer stalking and fishing to continue at levels compatible with conservation to help maintain employment for local people.

Female Dunlin - one of several Flow Country waders *J.T. Fisher*

RSPB's Marine Life Campaign

The sea has had an enormous impact on Scotland. It is a magnet to young and old alike as well as an economic resource and avenue for trade. For those of us with an interest in natural history it is of particular interest and importance; in world terms our most important species and habitats are marine or marine influenced. SBN has regularly featured articles on seabirds and their conservation. In this issue Dave Mitchell outlines RSPB's priorities for marine conservation with special reference to the North Sea.

The case for action

Scotland's breeding seabird populations are of global importance. 48% of the World's Gannets, 36% of Europe's Manx Shearwaters and 58% of Europe's Bonxies breed on our coasts and islands. Fishing is a major Scottish industry, employing many thousands of people directly and indirectly, often providing the mainstay of fragile rural economies. Yet, despite all this, our most important seabird feeding sites are left unprotected, the seas around our coast are routinely used as the dumping site for noxious wastes and politicians have so badly mismanaged our once great marine fisheries that their long term future is in doubt.

The case for conservation action is clear, so in May last year, the RSPB launched its Marine Life Campaign with the aim of focussing public opinion on the problems and on the actions that are so urgently needed to put things to rights.

North Sea focus

The first three phases of the Campaign were completed in 1994 and the RSPB's efforts are now focussed on the North Sea Conference in June 1995. This conference, whose delegates will come from the governments of all countries surrounding the North Sea, will decide the future of the North Sea ecosystem, its birds, mammals and fish, for years to come.

The Marine Life Campaign opened with a plan for better protection of our most important seabird sites. This was not just the breeding colonies themselves - there are, after all, very few serious threats to a sea-cliff! - but, more importantly, the main feeding areas. These tend to be in the immediate vicinity of the breeding colonies, but not invariably; the Wee Bankie, a few miles off Fife Ness, is a major hunting ground for seabirds of many species breeding on the Isle of May. Its shallow waters, rich in fish, have been known to the fishermen of the East Neuk since the Middle Ages. There are undoubtedly many other such sites, shallow shoals and the like, ideal spawning and feeding areas for many kinds of fish. The Dogger Bank springs to mind as one such site, well-known for centuries to North Sea fishermen and for considerably longer to the birds of the North Sea.

Sites under threat

These sites are under threat - increasingly so. In the last few years Danish trawlers supplying that country's voracious fish-meal industry have discovered the coast of Scotland in a big way and are "hoovering up" an annual catch of sand-eels in particular that can now be measured in hundreds of thousands of tonnes.

Fixed salmon nets set below Auk colonies can and do kill large numbers of individual birds at some sites and must have some, although probably limited, effect on the health of discrete populations. A case has occurred at the Bullers of Buchan in recent years.

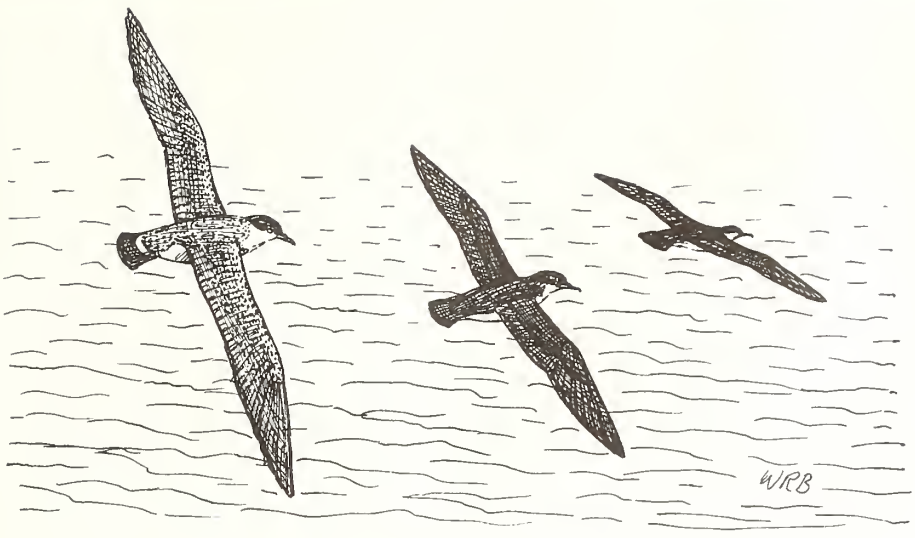
Long term interests

It would be in the long term interests of fishermen, seabirds and the marine ecosystem as a whole if the most important areas were properly safeguarded. It is vital to remember that the sea is not a uniform expanse with each area identical to its neighbour. The marine environment is at least as diverse as the terrestrial and the "hot spots" have a knock on effect on the rest of the ocean totally disproportionate to their size because of their role as spawning and nursery grounds.

The RSPB is not advocating the blanket imposition of no fishing zones, although for some sites a total ban on fishing might well be the best policy. Normally, however, some combination of closed seasons and restrictions on certain types of gear will be all that is required. As a rather tenuous terrestrial comparison, on a Scottish grouse moor adult birds are shot - if stocks permit - for a few days after 12th August. There is no question of killing grouse all the year round, adults, young and eggs alike!

Bonxie *William Paton*

Over half of Europe's Great Skuas breed in Scotland with the biggest colonies in Shetland.



Manx Shearwaters *Bill Brackenridge*

Another species with important breeding populations on some Scottish islands

Pollution control

The Campaign's second phase focussed on marine pollution control measures and, in particular, on the RSPB's recommendations that ports should be equipped to take waste from vessels to help the shipping industry avoid the temptation to jettison garbage - of whatever type - at sea.

The North Sea is one of the most polluted parts of the world ocean. Chemical waste, as well as raw and partly treated sewage, pour into it daily in vast quantities. Solid waste from ship and shore coats the seabed, litters coasts and defiles the sea's surface. The tragedy is that the North Sea is potentially a tremendous resource which could be of enormous value to north-west Europe. The North Sea fisheries were among the world's most productive and could achieve that status again; it could become a focus for sea and shore based leisure activities of many types.

Instead man's mistreatment of the North Sea as a long-suffering combination of dustbin and open sewer dooms it to fall well short of that potential. Much of the problem will be with us for many years. Plastic waste is long lived, and nerve gases and other acutely toxic material dumped into the North Sea after the Second World War have yet to cause much damage but when the containers corrode, as they surely will, who can say what the consequences will be?

Recommendations

All is not doom and gloom however, and positive steps can be taken very quickly which will have immediate results. Waste of all types is jettisoned from marine shipping on a massive scale - not just solid material but also the oily waste from bilge tanks which can have such a devastating effect on sea birds.

What the RSPB is advocating is equivalent to the provision of litter bins near fast food joints. The shipping industry produces waste which can do damage if improperly disposed of, but we believe that adequate provision of suitable waste disposal facilities in ports, better enforcement of existing regulations and increased penalties for violators will have a rapid and marked effect on overall marine pollution. The costs are small, the requirements well-known, action is long overdue.

Fisheries management

Phase three of the Marine Life Campaign dealt with sea fisheries. In many ways this phase contained the thorniest issues the campaign had to deal with. The fishing industry is important to Scotland, bringing employment and economic opportunity to some of our remoter areas. The deep sea fisherman's life remains hard and dangerous. It was essential to ensure that the RSPB's criticisms and our recommendations for the future were not seen as threatening the industry's long-term viability.

In fact industry spokesmen were quick to recognise that the main thrust of this phase of the Marine Life campaign, the call for a sensibly and sustainable managed fishery, was one the industry could happily endorse as meeting its long term needs and aims. This agreement that fishermen and conservationists have at least some goals in common is one of the most positive signs to have emerged from the campaign to date.

The question of what constitutes a marine ecosystem in natural balance is as abstruse, and ultimately as irrelevant, as the medieval debate about the number of angels which could dance on the point of a needle. Conservationists have to accept that the North Sea has all but totally lost major parts of its original natural balance. Cetaceans, in particular the great whales, are gone and will not return in anything like their original abundance in our lifetimes. Fish stocks and the age structures of fish communities have been massively altered by fishing pressure. There is no way back to some original marine arcadia.

The crucial point for fishermen and conservationists is this: the North Sea fishery is currently being managed in a way which will cause important fish stocks to collapse in the next very few years, causing widespread unemployment in fishing communities and unpredictable but major changes in sea bird populations.

Gannet *Bernie Zonfrillo*

And yet .....a temporary reduction in fishing pressure - perhaps a cut in the overall catch by 30% for three years - would give stocks a chance to recover at least in part to a level where they could support a human fishery at its present level as well as healthy bird and mammal populations.

Overcropping a renewable resource is bad economics and bad conservation alike. Current fishery management is like cutting down an orchard to harvest the apples. The sea and its fish stocks have enormous capacity for recovery if given a chance. Giving them that chance is only a matter of political will. Let us all do what we can to ensure that the British delegates to the North Sea Conference have conservation measures at the top of their agenda.

David Mitchell.

Rough-legged Buzzard *Mike Ashley*

The Scottish Birds Records Committee and Record Assessment in Scotland

The Scottish Birds Records Committee was set up by SOC Council in 1984 with the intention that all unusual Scottish records should be properly examined prior to publication in the *Scottish Bird Report*, thereby ensuring the integrity and reputation of the publication. Records of British rarities (birds on the British Birds Rarities Committee list) have since 1958 required to be submitted to BBRC prior to acceptance. The problem had been with other species which are uncommon in a Scottish context.

Since its formation SBRC has always produced a list of species for which it considered all records should be assessed. However Local Recorders could decide whether to submit records or not. Whilst the SBRC has always been available to ease the job of Local Recorders, there has been an uneven approach throughout the country, with most Local Recorders submitting all appropriate records to SBRC, others using local assessment committees and a few adjudicating on records entirely by themselves.

With the advent in recent years of many excellent local records committees, it was decided that a more uniform approach was required, aimed at improving and where possible standardising record assessment. A three tier system has now been introduced in Scotland, with BBRC assessing British rarities, SBRC assessing birds rare in a Scottish context and the local committees assessing records of slightly less rare Scottish species together with all other local rarities. In areas where local committees do not yet exist, SBRC will fill that function, although we wish to encourage the setting up of local committees covering the whole of Scotland. At present only eight of the twenty three Local Recorders in Scotland have still to establish local assessment committees.

Following consultation between Ray Murray, the Editor of the *Scottish Bird Report* and SBRC and after seeking the views of Local Recorders, it has been agreed that with effect from the 1994 *SBR*, records of species appearing on the SBRC List will not appear in the *SBR* unless they have been assessed and accepted by either SBRC or a local committee. The importance of Local Reports is now fully appreciated and it is hoped that editors of these publications will adopt a similar policy.

The S.B.R.C. List

CORY'S SHEARWATER
GREAT SHEARWATER
MEDITERRANEAN SHEARWATER
Little Egret
PURPLE HERON
White Stork
Spoonbill
Green-winged Teal
RING-NECKED DUCK
FERRUGINOUS DUCK
Surf Scoter
Honey Buzzard
MONTAGU'S HARRIER
ROUGH-LEGGED BUZZARD
Hobby
Crane
STONE CURLEW
Little Ringed Plover
KENTISH PLOVER
Pectoral Sandpiper
Buff-breasted Sandpiper
Mediterranean Gull
Sabine's Gull
RING-BILLED GULL
HERRING GULL (yellow-legged races MICHAHELLIS AND CACHINNANS)
Bee-eater
LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER
SHORT-TOED LARK
WOODLARK
Richard's Pipit
TAWNY PIPIT
Water Pipit
Nightingale
CETTI'S WARBLER
SAVI'S WARBLER
AQUATIC WARBLER
Marsh Warbler
Icterine Warbler**
MELODIOUS WARBLER
DARTFORD WARBLER
Barred Warbler**
Pallas's Warbler
Firecrest
Red-breasted Flycatcher**
BEARDED TIT
WOODCHAT SHRIKE
SERIN
Common Rosefinch**
CIRL BUNTING
Ortolan Bunting**
LITTLE BUNTING

KEY

BLOCK CAPITALS: *SBRC would prefer to receive all records.*

Lower Case: *These should normally be dealt with locally if a local records committee exists, but should be submitted to SBRC (by the Local Recorder) if no local committee exists.*

***A dispensation has been granted to the Local Recorders in Shetland and Orkney that records of these species can be accepted at their discretion without full written descriptions.*

By introducing this system we should have a more uniform approach to record assessment, aimed at achieving the aspiration of SOC Council when they originally set up SBRC.

The present SBRC members (with the year they are due to retire)

Angus Hogg (Chair)	1995
Ron Forrester (Secy)	1996*
Ken Shaw	1997
Eric Meek	1998
Pete Gordon	1999
Kevin Osborn	2000
David Clugston	2001

** The Secretary will cease voting on records in 1996 and a new voting member will be elected. The Secretary will then become a non-voting member, but will not retire in rotation.*

The original members of SBRC were Bernard Zonfrillo (Chairman), Roger Broad, Alan Brown, Roy Dennis, Peter Ellis, Angus Hogg and Brian Marshall. In 1990 SBRC commenced a rotation with one member retiring each year, and, by the end of this year, there will have been a complete change of members with the last of the original committee having retired. The vacancy is advertised annually in *Scottish Bird News* when SOC members are invited to submit nominations for the Committee.

SBRC has produced a list of Scottish birds which SOC Council agreed to adopt as an official Scottish List, with SBRC being delegated responsibility for maintaining the list and publishing regular amendments. The list was published in the Summer 1994 issue of *Scottish Birds*.

SBRC has been looking at records of "Yellow-legged Gulls" in Scotland and hope soon to produce a short paper on the subject. The Committee has also recently commenced work on tabulating all acceptable records of species recorded in Scottish on five or fewer occasions. This should be ready for publication within the next twelve months. Future projects which SBRC are hoping to complete include a list of all sub species recorded in Scotland.

Ronald W Forrester
Secretary
Scottish Birds Records Committee.

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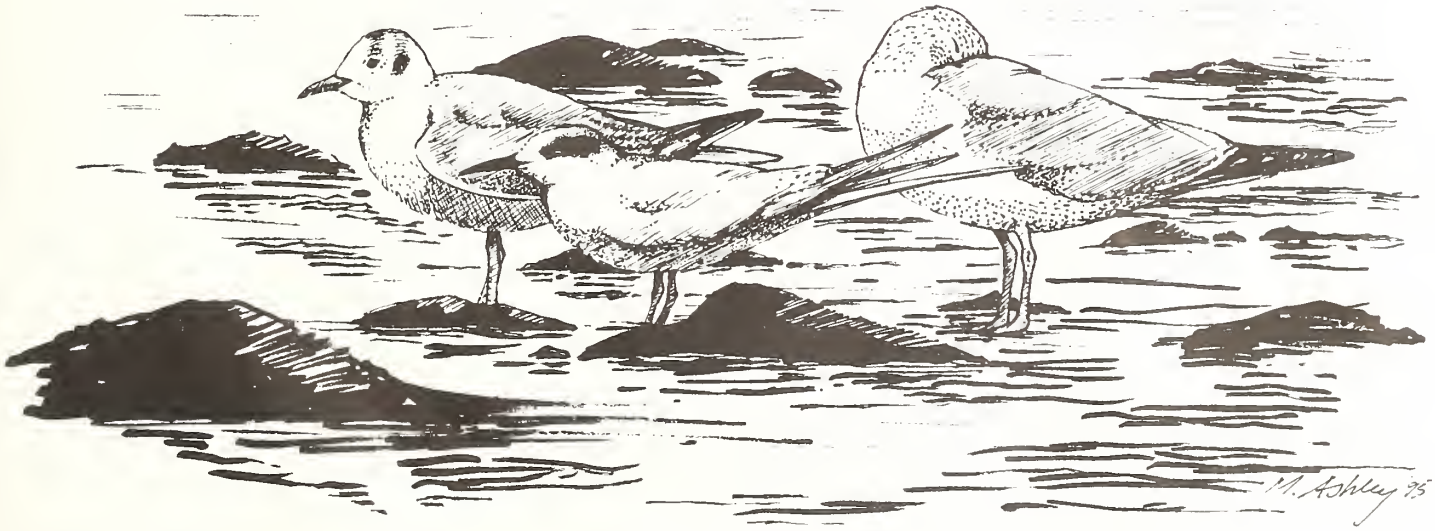

Forster's Tern. This first winter bird attracted many more birders than usual to the Musselburgh area this winter. *Mike Ashley*

REVIEWS

***Barn Owls** by Iain Taylor. Cambridge University Press. 304pp. ISBN 0-521-39290-X*

This long awaited work vividly succeeds in exploring the relationship between a predator and prey. The predator is of course the Barn Owl and the Short-tailed Field Vole the main prey in the UK though replaced by a range of other small mammals throught the rest of the world. It brings together the vast literature on the species and studies the varying stages of the bird's life in relation to otherwise unpublished work done in SW Scotland.

Each significant element of the bird's life is given a chapter: Distribution and variation; Diet; Foraging behaviour, Ecology and behaviour of prey, Prey selection, foraging habitats and energetics; Ranging and roosting behaviour; Moult; Breeding seasons; Nest sites; Courtship and eggs; Production of young; Dispersal; Mortality; Population size and regulation; Conservation. Each of these is clearly broken up into a number of discrete sub units and ends with a brief summary. The style of presentation was unusual in a scientific text with the constant use of the first person e.g. "I found that.....".

The book is illustrated throughout by a series of black and white photos taken by the author around the world showing a range of habitats and nest sites used by Barn Owls. Each chapter (along with the front cover) starts with a relevant illustration by Keith Brockie. Keith's work is admired by an increasingly large number of people and this current collection exhibits clearly his evolving style.

The subtitle of the book "Predator-prey relationship and conservation" is a little misleading as only one of the sixteen chapters contains information on conservation. However many important aspects of the life of the Barn Owl are covered which will no doubt have a profound significance of the understanding and management of this magical bird. To quote Ian Newton - "Effective conservation of raptors ultimately depends on a thorough understanding of what regulates their numbers". This book will help.

Ian Langford.

***Hamlyn Species Guides - The Barn Owl** by Colin Shawyer. 128pp. £9.99 ISBN 0-600-57949-2*

This well illustrated and easily read paper back will be of interest to everyone who has even a passing interest in this magnificent bird. The book contains the range of chapters one would expect on a single species with such a world wide distribution. The chapter on hunting was an interesting tale of how man's influence over a very long time has/may have affected Barn Owl numbers and distribution. I am sure the idea of encouraging rats back into fields will raise a few eyebrows and smiles from others! There is, at times, an little over emphasis on the work of Hawk and Owl Trust but then again they are doing things.

Ian Langford.

***Raptor Conservation Today**. Edited by B-U Meyburg and R D Chancellor 1994. Pica Press, Helm Information Ltd: Mountfield, Nr. Robertsbridge, East Sussex. 799pp. £30.00 ISBN 1-873403-33-X*

These are the proceedings of the IV World Conference on Birds of Prey and Owls, held in Berlin in May 1992. 99 papers where presented at the conference, each of about 5-10 pages in length. They are arranged in 10 sections covering such topics as: population studies; trapping, marking and radio tagging; reintroductions; and environmental contaminants. It could be considered as a "Who is doing what with raptors throughout the world" and as such is an excellent source book. It is a book for browsing rather than reading from cover to cover, but is a feast of information and well worth the £30 - if only to stimulate some ideas for future travels! I found articles such as the European Black Vulture Project in Mallorca, and regulation of Goshawk numbers in Finland most informative, while others such as the shooting of raptors in Malta rather depressing. Articles of local interest include those on the reintroduction programmes of the Red Kite (McGrady et al) and White-tailed Eagle (Evans et al.), and the relationships of moult with food supply and reproductive success in Tawny Owls Steve Petty. These were the only three contributions from the UK - not reflecting the dearth of raptor studies here, but in contrast to other parts of the world, highlighting the vast amount done by amateurs - who cannot attend academic meetings.

Ian R Poxton.

***Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa: The Birds of the Western Palearctic.** Stanley Cramp & Chris Perrins eds. Vol. 7. Crows to Finches. 1994. 912pp, 39 colour plates. Oxford University Press. £95. ISBN 0-19-854679-3; and Vol. 9. Buntings and New World Warblers. 1994. 496pp, 20 colour plates. Oxford University Press. £85. ISBN 0-19-854843-5.*

With the publication of volumes 8 and 9 "BWP" is at last complete, and it is a remarkable achievement. The same high standards have been maintained as for the earlier volumes. Despite the 17 years between the publication of volume 1 and volume 9 a remarkably consistent treatment of species has been achieved, which says much for the wisdom of the initial planning which dates from the 1960s. Vol. 9 has a fascinating forward by Max Nicholson, who has been an unbreakable link in the chain since those early days. I was delighted to learn that on his 90th birthday in July 1994 he was presented with the first bound volume of vol. 9, especially flown in from India. A charming and fitting gesture.

The complete Handbook covers over 770 species in more than 7000 pages and over 440 pages of full-colour plates. Even the scarce accidentals, e.g. American warblers, are given an average of two full pages of text and three or four colour illustrations. These is a special offer of the complete nine volumes until 31st March 1995 for £650 (ISBN 0-19-854890-7) after which the full list price of £755 will apply.

Bill Harper.

***New World Warblers** by Jon Curson, David Quinn and David Beadle. Helm Identification Guides. 1994. £24.99. ISBN 0-7136-3932-6.*

The latest Helm Identification Guide maintains the very high standard of presentation, accuracy and completeness which we have come to expect. All 116 species of New World Warblers are dealt with and follow the successful format of the series, including essential plumage details, habitat and habits and the familiar distribution maps. The thirty-six colour plates are outstanding with the two artists producing superb images and include some species endemic to Central America which have not been illustrated before.

I strongly recommend this book to SOC members.

David Clugston.

Birds of Arran *by John Rhead and Philip Snow. Saker Press 1994. 49pp. £4.95*

This informative booklet includes notes on when to go, accommodation and transport, an overview of habitats (past, present and potential), descriptions of 17 birding sites with maps (for most), access and parking, a concise systematic list, references and useful addresses. Despite some room for improvement in lay-out, this attractively illustrated, readable and serviceable book will enhance both visits to the island and visitors' contributions to Arran ornithology.

Trevor Smith.

"M.F.M.M." (M.F.M. Meiklejohn) *1994. Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Clyde Branch. £4.95*

SOC President 1960-63, founding editor of *Scottish Birds*, and Professor of Italian at Glasgow University, Maury Meiklejohn was also a talented writer. This is evident from his numerous articles in the *Glasgow Herald*. Eighty of these carefully crafted gems - on birds and many other things besides - are reproduced in "M.F.M.M." Its facsimile format is particularly appropriate as it enables us also to enjoy Jack Fleming's wonderful illustrations in their original typographical setting; both men had a lovely sense of humour. In short, this is an admirable publication which deserves every success.

Geoffrey Harper

'M.F.M.M.'
Soft cover, 92pp, obtainable from The Clyde Branch, Scottish Ornithologists' Club, c/o David Clugston, 14 Rosewood Avenue, Paisley, Strathclyde PA2 9NJ. Price £4.95 inc. p & p. Cheque payable to SOC Clyde Branch.

Moult and Ageing of European Passerines, *by Lukas Jenni and Rafael Winkler. Academic Press Ltd., London 1994. 224pp. £40.00 ISBN 0-12-384150-X.*

This superbly produced, large format reference work deals with only 58 species, but in great detail. Data were collected from 140,000 birds at ringing stations in Switzerland, Italy and at the Basel Natural History Museum. Of the 480 full-colour photos of extended wings - the showpiece of the book - only about 20 are from the museum collection. Anyone interested in moult studies should consult it.

Tom Dougall.

MEMBERS REQUESTS

Look out for Goosanders!

10 Goosanders have been given a pink wing tag on the left wing on the Eden Estuary, Fife in August 1994. In addition a single male Red-breasted Merganser was tagged on the right wing with a blue tag. Records of any of these birds or of Goosanders tagged in previous years with blue (1992) or red (1993) tags on their left wings would be very much appreciated. They have been tagged by the Tay Ringing Group on behalf of Dr Mick Marquiss of the Institute of Terrestial Ecology. Any sightings should be reported to **Les Hatton, North East Fife Ranger Service, Craigtoun Country Park, St. Andrews, Fife KY16 8NX; Tel. 01334 472151** All records will be acknowledged.

Wing-tagged Red Kites released in Scotland

All Red Kites released in Scotland as part of the joint JNCC/RSPB reintroduction project have been fitted with wing tags. The tags are not necessarily the same on each wing. (See SBN 33 & 34 for illustrated details of tags). Please contact **Lorcan O'Toole** with any sighting however incomplete at **RSPB, North Scotland Office, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW., tel 01463 715000** as soon as possible so that sightings can be followed up.

Colour marked Greylag Geese

Over 150 Icelandic Greylag Geese were caught in the autumn in Highland Region as part of a joint study carried out by members of the Highland Ringing Group and Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust. All birds have been dyed on their tails. In addition either a darvic ring or neck collar has been added. These have two letters which can be read from the base upwards.

Sightings of Greylags bearing dye marks, darvic rings or neck collars, together with details of colour and letters seen (no matter how incomplete), should be sent to:-

Brian Etheridge, Morven, Station Road, Avoch, Ross-shire IV9 8RW. Telephone: 01381-620098 (home) or 01463-715000 (work)

NB This address supersedes that given last winter.

Colour ringed Stonechats

Over the past four years, approximately 200 birds (mainly pulli) have been colour-ringed at both inland and coastal sites in the Aberdeen area.

Evidence suggests that young birds can disperse over considerable distances and I would therefore by very grateful for details of any sightings in Scotland. Note should be made of the colour combination, and which leg bears the metal and which the colour rings. All sightings will be acknowledged. **Andy Thorpe, 15 Albyn Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 1YP.**

Colour ringed Ring Ouzels

A study by David Arthur of Ring Ouzels in Glen Esk, Angus, is now in its third year. A number of birds have been individually colour ringed and any sightings of colour ringed Ring Ouzels will be greatly appreciated by David. Please contact **David Arthur, 12 Dundee Street, Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7PD. 01241 853356.** All sightings will be acknowledged.

Wing Tagged Sea Eagles

Anybody who sees a wing tagged Sea Eagle should contact either the **RSPB, North Scotland Office, at Etive House, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW. Tel 01463 715000 or**
Roger Broad, RSPB, West of Scotland Office, Science Park, Glasgow. G20 0SP. Tel 0141 945 5224. as soon as possible.

Wing tagged Hen Harriers

Marked birds are carrying a coloured tag on each wing. Although the colour on each wing may be different a single letter or number is repeated on each tag. Details of any sightings however incomplete should be sent to **Brian Etheridge, RSPB North Scotland Office, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW tel 01463 715000** as soon as possible.

Photographic Competition Winners 1994

1st - Sam Alexander - Snipe preening.
2nd - Mary MacIntyre - Black Guillemots in winter plumage
3rd equal - Mary MacIntyre - Corn Bunting; Alan Ross - female Short-eared Owl and chick.

SOC NOTICES

1995 Annual Conference

A note for your diaries. This year's Annual Conference will be held over the weekend 3rd/5th November 1995 at the Duke of Gordon Hotel in Kingussie. We also hope that our guest speaker will be none other than Algirdas Knystautas the famous Russian author of "The Natural History of the USSR", and more recently "The Birds of Russia" which was published by Harper Collins in 1993. He has also contributed to many TV programmes including the highly acclaimed BBC series "The Realms of the Russian Bear".

Those members who were lucky enough to hear Algirdas in Edinburgh last year will agree that he speaks entertainingly and with a great knowledge and love of his subject. It will be well worth the effort to come along for the 1995 conference.

60th Anniversary

As some members may be aware 1996 is the 60th anniversary of the SOC, and Pamela and myself are keen to try and organise a special celebration which will be open to all members, so if you have any ideas as to what you would like to do please get in touch with us at 21 Regent Terrace.

Some branches may also like to organise a special event locally, again we would like to hear from you. A wine and cheese evening, with some slides depicting how events have changed over the last 60 years may be one idea. Over to the members now for suggestions.

Scotland's first birdwatching fair

On the weekend 5/6 August the RSPB's Vane Farm reserve will be the venue for what is anticipated will be the largest event of its kind ever held in Scotland. It will be organised jointly by RSPB and Lizars. Obviously there will be displays and demonstrations of optical equipment and other items of interest to birdwatchers. The SOC will be taking part. More information will follow in the June SBN.

Kodak Photographic Competition

The RSPB, Scotland are running a photographic competition until June 30th 1995. In the junior event (under 17) the subject is 'Scotland and its wildlife'. In the senior event the subject is 'Biodiversity'. All pictures must be on Kodak film. Details from Mike Robinson, RSPB, 17 Regent Terr. Edinburgh EH7 5BN. No pictures of birds at the nest will be considered.

200 Club

Winners in the fourth quarter of 1994 were:-

October 1st £30 - Miss B J Cain, Beeswing, Dumfries; 2nd £25 - M Shave, Dorset; 3rd £20 - Dr E Tennant, Glasgow; 4th £10 - D Mackenzie, Peterhead.
November 1st £100 - F D Hamilton, Longniddry; 2nd £75 - Mrs M Lennox, Melrose; 3rd £50 - J C Maxwell, Hamilton; 4th £30 - Miss E M Lapthorn, Dunblane; 5th £20 - Mrs M Draper, Glasgow; 6th £10 - J H Ballantyne, Edinburgh.
December 1st £30 - Miss S E Horsburgh, Peebles; 2nd £20 - P W Speak, Longniddry; 3rd £10 - Dr A V M Davidson, St. Andrews.

At the end of May the 200 Club will have completed its sixth year, and during this time it has raised over £10,000. Half of this has been returned to its members in prizes and over £5,000 has been given to the SOC for internal refurbishment of 21 Regent Terrace. In the past twelve months over £1,000 has been spent on two good chairs for the office, and a good start has been made on replacing night store heaters which are over 20 years old and obsolete. More will be replaced with income received after 1st June.

In its last annual report Council expressed its thanks to some 170 members for their support, which is very gratefully welcomed by the SOC. A very warm "thank you" is therefore due to all 200 Club members. We still hope to attract 200 members, who must be SOC members over the age of 18.

The 200 Club 'year' starts on 1st June and renewal notices to existing members who pay by cash or cheque will be sent out in the next few weeks. If you would like to join, or even take out a second membership, please send me a cheque for £12, payable to "SOC 200 Club", and your membership will start from that date. Your cheque will be acknowledged. If you wish to pay by Banker's Order please contact me and I will send you a form.

Prizes varying from £100 to £10 are drawn each month. Last year the total prize money increased to £1,085 and over 40 members won at least one prize. Do please support, or continue to support, this very worthwhile method of helping the SOC.

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL. Tel. 01896 822 176.

Library Opening

Due to the very poor response to the advertised evening openings of the Library it has been decided not to continue with the experiment. Members who wished to use the Library outwith office hours should contact the Librarian who ***might*** be able to make some special arrangement.

1994 Raffle winners

The 1994 SOC Annual Raffle was run again this year by the Fife branch, and made a total net profit of £661.25 which was kindly donated to the Club. Thanks to everyone who helped.

1st - £200 - T. Shannon, Dumfries.
2nd - £100 - E. Bird, Aberdeen.
3rd - Binoculars - N. Lyons, Bridge of Allan.
4th - Atlas of Breeding Birds - P. Lackie, Edinburgh.
5th - Atlas of Breeding Birds - K.M. Brown, Dollar.
6th - Great Auk Islands - G. Waters, Edinburgh.
7th - Bird Book - M.P. Harris, Banchory.
8th - Bird Book - M. Paterson, Thurso.
9th - Malt Whisky - W. Dott, Edinburgh.
10th - Whisky - A. Florence, Bonnyrigg.
11th - Wine - P. Rathbone, Clwyd.
12th - Wine - A. Hill, Gauldry.
13th - Wine - G. Bell, Bamburgh.
14th - Wine - M. Fordyce, Fraserburgh.
15th - Christmas Cake - E. Hall, Aberdeen.
16th - Dipper Print - D. Warner, Glencoe.
17th - Silk Tie - M. Scott, Newport-on-Tay.
18th - 2 pieces of Salamander Glass - P. Graeme, Ceres.
19th - Wine - R. Riddle, Culzean.
20th - Wine - G. Rebecca, Peterculter.
21st - Champagne - R. Gillan, Aberdeen.
22nd - Bird Book - I. Duncan, Perth.
23rd - MacGillivray Book - K. Watson, Dundee.
24th - Painting - C. Whitby, Weymouth.
25th - Pen set - C. Baister, Bearsden.
26th - 2 Crystal Brandy glasses - P. Branscombe, St Andrews.
27th - Smoke Alarm - D. Anderson, Kinlochbervie.

Thanks to

Thanks are due once again to the army of volunteers who willingly come into 21 every quarter and stuff envelopes. The stuffers for the December mailing include:- Andrew & Jenny Black, Rosemary Davidson, Bob & Betty Smith, Paul Speak, Ethel Russell, Sheila Stuart and Joan Wilcox apologies to anyone who has been missed out.

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THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

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Edited by Sylvia Laing and Stan da Prato
Assisted by Pamela Black

SEP 13 1995
LIBRARIES

How safe are our raptors?

For some time now calls have appeared in the media for a relaxation of the legal protection currently afforded to birds of prey. Often advanced under the guise of protecting songbirds or the rural economy the real basis is the belief among some landowners and keepers that populations of species such as Red Grouse are suffering due to an increase in predation. Most birdwatchers are aware that population levels of several raptors, notably the Hen Harrier, are still held down by illegal killing. They should also be aware that our current Government is more sympathetic to the views of landowners than conservationists even when these are based on scientific research. Against this worrying background the Scottish Raptor Study Groups discussed the issue at their February conference.

The law at present

Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981 it is an offence intentionally to kill, injure or take any wild bird; to take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built; or to take or destroy an egg of any wild bird. Special protection is afforded to Schedule 1 species. These include Golden and White-tailed Eagle, Goshawk, all harriers, Red Kite, Merlin, Osprey and Peregrine. Buzzard, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel have ordinary protection.

In theory, licences could be given for control of raptors for the purposes of conserving wild birds or preventing serious damage to livestock (including game birds in captivity) and fisheries. Non-Schedule 1 raptors can be destroyed by an "authorised person" in terms of the Act (without a licence) for the purpose of preventing serious damage to livestock or fisheries, but the onus is on the person concerned to show that this action is necessary. In addition, the European Community Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (79/409) requires member states to take special conservation measures for Annex 1 species, including Golden Eagle, Hen Harrier and Peregrine.

When the Wildlife and Countryside Bill was going through Parliament, a statement was made in Hansard by a government spokesman that protection of wild birds against predation by other wild birds would not be a licensing matter. This was raised specifically in the context of Hen Harrier predation on Red Grouse. A recent House of Lords decision could allow the use of Hansard in interpreting the 1981 Act, where its provisions are not clear. A possible amendment to the 1981 Act may allow licences to be granted in future for control of birds to protect fauna and flora. That appears to envisage licensing in local situations of risk to very rare species and ought not to alter the general licensing principle stated by the Government spokesman back in 1981.

This Male Hen Harrier is brooding young - a very unusual sight. *Arthur Gilpin*

The agencies involved

The Department of the Environment has a general overview of licensing policy for Great Britain as a whole. They have stated that "there is no evidence to suggest that the disappearance of substantial numbers (of game birds) can be blamed solely on avian predators. In these circumstances, therefore, it would not be appropriate to amend the law in any way which would reduce the level of protection for birds of prey."

The Joint Nature Conservation Committee apparently would not be involved in licensing matters, but they may have some say on international aspects, e.g. European Community law. They appear, however, to have little political "clout".

Scottish Natural Heritage would be the agency primarily involved on the conservation of wild birds aspect, but where damage to livestock is concerned the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department could be the licensing agency. Their remit might therefore cover predation by Golden Eagles on lambs, Goshawks on Pheasants in release pens and Peregrines on racing pigeons, but Scottish Natural Heritage might still come into the picture as advisors.

The campaign against protected status

For a while now, contributors to *The Field* and *Shooting Times* have argued for licensed control. The editor of *Shooting Times* states that there is no editorial view on this at present, but that a view might be formed if evidence is available to justify it, and that contributors' opinions are prompted by discussions with gamekeepers with whom they have close links.

The Scottish Landowners' Federation has raised the issue, as reported in *The Scotsman* in December 1994, mentioning a leaked SLF document, an approach to Sir Hector Munro, Scottish Office Minister for Agriculture and the Environment and his suggestion that SNH had best lead on this issue. However, the SLF official position appears to be that it is not seeking a change in the law according to a letter from its Convener to *The Scotsman* on 14 December 1994. That would still leave the position open for licence applications. Sources close to the SLF have commented that the "party line" in relation to raptors is to lobby for change, but that change is likely to be a long time in coming, and to be publicly acceptable would have to be brought in in the context of conservation of other prey species than grouse alone. SLF's comment to the Cairngorms Working Party report in June 1993 included the statement: "we envisage a system of careful monitoring by SNH and the JNCC which would allow, in specific cases, for the control of protected species under licence in a specific area, for a specified time, by authorised individuals only".

The scientific case

This should be the basis for any discussion of change to the current law or of licence applications, although there is no current scientific justification for any such change or for licensing. Unfortunately, the impact of raptors on game populations, particularly Red Grouse, is still controversial. Ecologists generally argue that predator numbers are controlled by the number and availability of prey, rather than vice versa, and that habitat quality is the really crucial factor in determining how many antelopes, grouse or fish can exist in a given area. Most shooters and hunters now accept that it is not in the long term interest of any predator to exterminate its prey. However, many in the sporting lobby think that they are in competition with predators for the "harvestable surplus" element of the prey population, especially in semi natural habitats such as grouse moor. If crows and foxes can be shown to adversely affect ground nesting birds - and they sometimes do, especially when plantations adjoin open ground - why not raptors? The Joint Raptor Study currently under way on the impact of raptors on game populations and involving The Game Conservancy, ITE and RSPB should provide some answers.

What should conservationists be doing?

Do not let opposing views make all the running. Be prepared to counter misleading propaganda when it appears - but only do so in a restrained and reasoned way. Point out that control under licence, should it be allowed, would be additional to the present illegal killing of and interference with raptors and not a replacement of it. Encourage SNH to stand up and be counted over this issue. There is some concern as to how strong their response may be. One of the two primary duties of SNH is to "secure the conservation and enhancement of the natural heritage of Scotland". Other considerations, for example to take into account the needs of owners and occupiers of land, should be secondary to this but clearly weigh heavily in the current political climate.

Above all, realise that this a political issue. Therefore, whenever appropriate take the matter up with UK and Euro M.P's and anyone else with influence.

The Editors are grateful to Patrick Stirling-Aird for the notes on which this article has been based.

Wildlife Crime

SNH and the RSPB recently hosted more than 20 police Wildlife Liaison Officers from across Scotland to a conference on wildlife crime.

Wildlife crime is an area of increasing concern. Badger baiting, trapping birds of prey for export, collecting eggs and poisoning birds are all illegal activities which still occur on a regular basis. For example, 13 birds of prey were found poisoned in Scotland last year. This is in breach of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and can attract fines of up to £2000 per offence.

Unfortunately wildlife crime by its very nature is often difficult to trace. A major aim of the conference is to improve the police's understanding of such crimes and lead to an increased number of prosecutions.

Each police force in Scotland has at least one nominated Wildlife Liaison Officer who takes on liaison duties in addition to their normal police work. Their specialised knowledge and close contact with conservation organisations - some of the police officers concerned are SOC members - tracking down wildlife crime. They are immediately informed of any breach of wildlife law within their area.

Red-legged Partridge

Jim Young

David Thorne and Alan Maule of the SOC Borders branch who helped to organise the very successful spring conference in 1995. (see report below) *Norah Armstrong*

Gala Day Out

The well attended SOC/BTO Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference on Saturday 4 March was held at the Scottish College of Textiles in Galashiels and successfully hosted by SOC Borders Branch. The venue proved excellent.

The morning session got off to a good start with Chris Badenoch's talk on Borders Landscape and Habitat. With a selection of slides, Chris was able to take us through the elements which make the area such a rich and diverse wildlife habitat. Next the increase among Borders Buzzards came in for close and expert scrutiny from Mark Holling. Before we broke for coffee, we made our first of a series of visits 'behind the curtain,' courtesy of the college's video camera and some fancy projection equipment, to the artist Chris Rose. This was, for me, the day's highlight. With each visit the progress of an oil painting of an Oystercatcher was monitored. We were also treated, over the course of the day, to charcoal and pastel techniques bringing to life the common House Sparrow (in two characteristic poses) and the Grey Heron. A real joy to watch! Nigel Clark then gave a detailed talk on the conflict between man and waders with particular reference to proposed tidal barrages. Lunch was preceded by Eric Middleton's excellent slides of Selkirkshire Birds.

So to the afternoon with Mike Tom's piece on the Barn Owl, in which he outlined the bird's status and told us why, at the edge of the bird's range, it requires our assistance to survive. Mike was followed by the double act of Mike Hodgson and John Day who gave us a spirited overview of the time and effort that went into the Northumberland Bird Atlas.

The day's final trio of three talks started with Kevin Rideout telling us about St Abbs National Nature Reserve. Andrew Bramhall and Ray Murray then treated us to video clips of the frantic efforts of the East of Scotland Swan Group ringing swans in the Borders. The final talk of the conference involved another double act. This time Ray Murray teamed up with Mark Holling to give an update on the progress of the South East Scotland Breeding Bird Atlas. Information from 1756 tetrads is now on computer and publication is imminent.

All that remained was to wind things up. The quiz results were given and prizes dished out. Scotland's rugby win over Wales was announced and we set off to drive home carefully through the rapidly deteriorating weather. A very well organised event, enjoyed by all.

Brian Downing.

Lead shot phase out begins next season

Conservationists, government departments, shooting organisations, landusers and the shotgun and ammunition industry met recently to review progress on eliminating lead shot from wetlands. Lead is highly poisonous and poses a particular threat to ducks, geese and swans. The meeting agreed that, after September 1995, lead shot from 12-bore guns should not be allowed to fall into coastal and inland wetlands where it might cause lead poisoning of waterfowl. Accordingly, any shooting with lead shot should not take place over estuaries, salt marshes, foreshore, lakes, reservoirs, gravel pits, ponds, rivers, marshes and other seasonally flooded land. Since shot gun pellets can travel considerable distances, such shooting should not take place near the wetland concerned if it would result in the shot falling within the wetland. A range of manufacturers are now making alternatives to lead shot. At first its use is voluntary. It is anticipated that a ban on the use of lead shot in or near wetlands will commence in September 1997.

Waterbirds, wetlands and recreation: putting sustainability into practice.

This is the title of an international conference jointly organised by the British Ornithologists' Union and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust. The aim of this conference is to synthesize current scientific understanding of the effects of recreational activities on wetland, to formulate solutions to specific problems and to consider how these may be consolidated within wider ecosystem management. In addition to the production of a scientific proceedings, the aim is to produce a practitioners guide to sustainable recreation on and around wetlands. The conference will be held at Wills Hall, Bristol, UK, from 19-21 April 1996. Offers of abstracts for posters and paper should not exceed 400 words and should be sent to: **Jeff Kirby, The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge, Gloucester, GL2 7BT, UK. Booking enquiries should be sent to: Graeme Greene, British Ornithologists' Union, c/o British Museum (Natural History), Sub-department of Ornithology, Tring, Hertfordshire PH23 6AP, UK.**

Mar Lodge future looking brighter!

As this issue went to press it was announced that the National Trust for Scotland would definitely be the new owners of the 77,000 acre Cairngorm estate thanks to money from the National Lottery. The property first made headlines when millionaire John Kluge bought it in 1987, allegedly to please his wife, who was more interested in its proximity to the royal residence of Balmoral than its rare wildlife or spectacular scenery. Since the lady in question had been "a model" , tabloid interest was assured. Interest from the Balmoral direction was less forthcoming. Not surprisingly, the owner soon let it be known that he was interested in selling up. RSPB, WWF and the Jonh Muir Trust formed a consortium in 1992 to buy Mar Lodge, but failed largely because the Scottish Office would not provide financial help. The National Trust for Scotland then emerged as the likely purchaser of land that is important both in its own right and as a key part of the Cairngorms, an area that many think should become a National Park.

It is not clear why the purchase by NTS has taken so long to conclude though the need to agree an instalment system whereby the price of around £10 million is paid over is likely to be one reason. There was also the need to ensure enough money to run the property. Now NTS has succeeded in buying Mar Lodge the question of management priorities comes to the fore.

Though NTS ownership will be seen as preferable to yet another absentee private landlord some hill goers and naturalists have criticised its priorities, notably over the interpretation of the Unna Bequest, the building of a visitor centre half way up Ben Lawers and the possibility of commercial deer staking on some properties. There is a feeling among some conservationists that NTS is somewhat elitist and less likely to criticise Government policy on the environment than the members of the 1992 consortium.

Cairngorm experts Adam and Drennan Watson have already written to NTS expressing concern that the Trust might devote too much attention to the Mar Lodge building and not enough to habitat regeneration through the removal of exotic species, such as Spruce and Larch, and the regeneration of native woodlands without the use of deer fencing - which means a deer cull on similar lines to RSPB's work in Abernethy on the other side of the Cairngorm. NTS have said that nature conservation will have a high priority on Mar Lodge. We await developments with interest.

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay - Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist - almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodland garden of Colonsay House.

Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (21/2 hour passage). Demi-pension from £60.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £140.00 weekly.

On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke - £16.00 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

THE HOTEL, ISLE OF COLONSAY, ARGYLL
(Kevin and Christa Byrne)
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How many mammals?

Readers of SBN will be familiar with the many census schemes that monitor bird populations. Equivalent data are far less available for most British mammals. To begin to rectify this, a group of well known mammal specialists has recently produced a report for the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, which estimates population levels for every British mammal species except cetaceans.

As the authors readily acknowledge many of the figures are very rough estimates indeed but they still contain fascinating information, much of it of significance to conservation in Scotland, and some of it directly relevant to certain of our birds, notably raptors and carrion feeders.

The most common mammal at 75 million is reckoned to be the Short-tailed Field Vole, well known to ornithologists as a major prey species for several owls and raptors. It is also the only mammal whose population exceeds that of *Homo sapiens* in Britain! However, vole numbers are reckoned to be well below levels reached in the recent past, notably in the 1890s, when the vole plague that devastated southern Scotland probably contained more animals in that region that now exist in the whole of Britain. The biggest declines have occurred in the lowlands due to more efficient farming, which is bad news for Barn Owls.

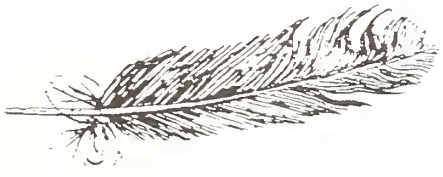
Rabbits are thought to be less numerous than Field Voles, Common Shrews and Wood Mice. However, they are bigger animals, and their biomass exceeds all other British species of wild mammals put together. No wonder farmers and gardeners complain, especially as the current population of under 40 million is well under what it must have been before myxomatosis, but increasing! The effect of Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease may be to reverse this trend. Though this would delight farmers it could set back Buzzard populations, which are currently increasing.

Of species in decline the greatest concerns are with the Brown Hare - probably at 20% of its former numbers - Red Squirrel and Water Vole with the last showing the greatest decrease.

It is a sign of changing attitudes and habitats that populations of formerly rare predators, such as Pine Marten and Otter, are healthy or even on the increase. The situation with the Wild Cat is less positive and complicated by feral animals and inter breeding. It will surprise Scots to learn that in Britain Badgers are slightly more numerous than Foxes.

Probably the best way to evaluate which mammals are of greatest significance for conservation is to look at their distribution in Britain compared to continental Europe. This immediately puts several tiny populations, eg of certain bats in southern England, into proper context. Britain holds around 30% of Europe's Red Deer; mostly in Scotland where their effect on the vegetation has led to widespread demands for a reduction in numbers *(why don't more Scots eat wild venison? - SdP does his best but even his gargantuan appetite hasn't had much impact on a population of over 300,000).* Strangely, 40% of Europe's Fallow Deer occur in Britain, though many of them are in England; this species was introduced from Mediterranean Europe by the Normans. Some of our carnivores are very important. Scotland hold an important, though unknown, proportion of Europe's Otters. Both Common (40%) and Grey Seals (78%) are extremely important in European terms and many breed around Scottish coasts. Even some feral animals are important, notably Soay Sheep, thought to be directly descended from Neolithic animals imported around 5,000 BC.

A Review of British Mammals: Population Estimates and Conservation Status of British Mammals other than Cetaceans *by S Harris, P Morris, S Wray & D Yalden is published by JNCC.*



Still no National Parks

Scotland is to continue to be one of the few countries in the world without a single National Park. Scottish Office Minister Sir Hector Monro claims that he "wants something better than national parks for Scotland", a comment which might surprise anyone who has visited places like Yellowstone or the Serengeti. If Sir Hector was referring to English National Parks, he has a point, but that might not go down too well with the Dept of the Environment. Sir Hector's comments came while defending the Scottish Office decision to set up a joint committee, largely made up of representatives from the 3 new local authorities of Dumbarton, Stirling and Argyll, but also representing agriculture and forestry interests to manage Loch Lomond.

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Age composition of a Goldfinch flock.

On 11 September 1994, I located a flock of about 80 Goldfinches at Kincraig Point, near Elie, Fife. The flock was very mobile, but at one point perched in the crowns of a row of sycamore trees, and I proceeded to count them. Part of the flock was hidden, but I was surprised to find that, of the 41 that I counted, every individual was a juvenile. It seems probable that most (if not all) of the remainer were of the same age. I was certainly unable to see any adults in the flock. In Newton's *Finches* (1972) there is no mention of age composition of flocks, although BWP Vol 3 (p575) states that in Germany 'early autumn flocks up to100 birds comprised groups of independent juveniles and family parties'.

Norman Elkins

Long staying Waxwing

Arriving on 7 January 1995 at Bankfoot, Perthshire, our Waxwing remained with us through to 21 March apart from an absence of 2/3 days. Feeding originally on Berberis berries, the main attraction proved to be skewered apples hanging on string from a cherry tree. As time went on, our bird acquired certain preferences, including Cox's Orange Pippins and Golden Delicious. This feeding technique was introduced by our dear friend, the late Dr. Grace Fleming, some years ago at her home at Dalry, Kirkcudbrightshire, with success. Unfortunately the local Blackbirds also utilised this available food supply to the full.

John Melrose

Problems on the Ythan

The River Ythan, near Aberdeen, is one of Scotland's smaller rivers. However, its reputation is world wide due to the studies on its wildlife and ecology carried out over many years by Aberdeen University. SOC members may have been seen recent films and news reports where the danger to the estuary from the spread of green algae has been highlighted. Conservationists are in no doubt that the source of the problem has been nitrate fertiliser running into a relatively small ecosystem from adjacent farmland.

As a result the 68,000-hectare Ythan catchment is being proposed by the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department as a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) under the EU Nitrates Directive. If designation is finalised (it was due in December 1993) more than 700 farmers in the area will have to limit applications of manure and inorganic fertilisers and keep detailed records of all field dressings. When the proposals for the Ythan area were published, the agriculture department was bombarded with objections from farmers who feel the Ythan has been singled out because of its birds. Of all the proposals for NVZs (two in Scotland and more than 70 in England and Wales) the Ythan is said to be the only one presented on the grounds of eutrophication when nitrogen compounds enrich water to produce excessive weed.

The North East River Purification Board was concerned that this weed growth was smothering the burrow-dwelling *Corophium*, an important food for both fish and birds. The board concluded that, as only 2% of nitrate in the catchment came from sewer outfalls, the rest must come from agriculture. Run off from agricultural land is recognised as the main source of nitrates in water coures throughout Western Europe. Nitrogen use has multiplied in the Ythan area by four times in 25 years.

Defending the Ythan farmers, the Scottish Landowners' Federation has suggested other possible sources of the nitrate, such as the atmosphere, although how this could contribute 5,000kg/day is not explained! The federation claims capital values of farms and agricultural rents will fall. Alec Sinclair, of the Scottish Agricultural College in Aberdeen, points out that today's farmers are picking up the bill for up to 100 years of agricultural practices, all of them approved by the authorities at the time.

Intensive livestock farmers face the particular problem of disposing of slurry. In the NVZ, they will rapidly reach the limit on their own land. Articles in the farming press and the *Financial Times* state that one hectare can only take the waste from 22 pigs. Intensive producers, with thousands of pigs, will have vast quantities of slurry to get rid off. There will be periods in winter during which manure cannot be used on fields at all because the ground will not absorb a sufficient amount of nitrogen. This means some farmers will need additional and expensive slurry storage.

Keep on feeding!

Despite frequently repeated, well meaning but ill informed advice that feeding garden birds in the breeding season is harmful, the current consensus is that it is not. Concern has been expressed that nestlings will die due to choking, or being unable to digest, inappropriate foods such as whole peanuts or dry bread. Both BTO and RSPB now recommend summer feeding. They are right to do so. Most birds will seek out the appropriate natural food for their young even if they use artificial supplies for themselves. This can be important in gardens where natural trees and plants, with their attendant invertebrates, are often scarce. Remember also that there is no one 'breeding season' for songbirds. Finches often breed later than tits and thrushes. Spring can be a time of serious food shortage for seed eaters. Continuing to feed food like peanuts may help adults come into breeding condition and probably improves the survival rate eg of Greenfinches. When feeding peanuts, put them in wire containers; if you are worried about young birds choking then don't feed peanuts or give them the kernels. However, young that have been found apparently choked would probably have died of starvation anyway, so don't hesitate to keep feeding your garden birds.

Stan da Prato

Euro cash for peatlands

Conservation and green tourism in the peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland have been given a boost with a £727,000 grant from the European Union's LIFE programme. The money has been awarded to help fund a major new peatland project being launched by a partnership of the RSPB, SNH and Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise. The project will run during 1995-96 and aims to promote the conservation of the peatland blanket bogs through land management, educational initiatives and green tourism. European funds will match expenditure already committed by the sponsoring agencies and it is estimated that the project will employ up to 4 people. Local people and schools will be encouraged to visit the new facilities and learn about the wildlife of the peatlands. Interpretive facilities will be developed at the appropriate locations and the partnership will examine ways of encouraging visitors to stay longer in the area in order to visit the peatlands. The RSPB's acquisition of the 17,600 acres Forsinard Estate will be partly funded by the LIFE grant, which may also assist other land acquisition.

Whimbrel *John Chapman*

Flatworms wanted

An unfortunate, but probably inevitable, result of the increased trade in plants through the world has been the accidental introduction of alien species. Usually this means the plants themselves, such as Himalayan Balsam, Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed and so on. However, animals can also be involved. One such is the New Zealand flatworm. This is a flat, purple brown worm with cream edges tapered at either end. It is most likely to be found coiled under stones.

This is thought to have reached Scotland in 1985, apparently having been introduced in plants imported for sale in garden centres. There are now over 700 records. The reason such an inconspicuous creature is causing concern is that it eats native earthworms and has the potential to seriously reduce their populations, which is bad news for gardeners, farmers and, of course, worm eating birds. Should anyone find a flatworm, **Dr Brian Boag of The Crop Research Institute, Invergowrie, Dundee DD2 5DA** wants to hear about it.

Slender-billed Curlews

Two items of news for those of you following the Slender-billed Curlew saga:

1) A translation of Viktor Belik's articles was published in Wader Study Group Bulletin (75: 37-38, 1994). A copy is in the SOC library. Reading the full articles will enable anyone interested in the subject to assess the relative merits of Belik's arguments and the alternative ideas of Dr Nowak (SBN 37: p5, March 1995).

2) The latest bulletin of the Russians' wader working group (Informatsionnye materialy R.G.K., No 8, p11, Moscow 1995) announces the next stage in the search for the species' breeding site(s). The new Russian Bird Conservation Union (SOPR) has set up an "initiative group" to coordinate international efforts. It consists of three wader working group members from Russia - including Viktor Belik - and one from Kazakhstan. One of the first tasks will be to investigate Belik's theory.

Geoffrey Harper

Given the tiny numbers of the species finding even one nest will be a considerable achievement. It seems only one bird was present last winter at the usual site in Morocco though a small group were found in January in southern Italy; to its credit the Italian Government posted guards to deter local shooters. Since the species is so unlikely to visit Scotland any further speculation as to its breeding grounds should be directed to a more appropriate outlet. Eds.

Red Kites make progress in Scotland

The newsletter which reports on the reintroduction programme informs us that 14 of the 24 kites released in July 1993 remained in their core area all winter. By late April, many of these birds started to disperse over wide areas, as has happened in previous years. Non breeding first year kites mainly visited areas to the south and south west of the release area. These roaming kites sometimes returned to roost from feeding areas up to 50km away. The two kites that visited Tomatin in the autumn of 1993 were both spotted this spring. Red 3 returned to the roost briefly in May while Red 2 had its wing tags read at Glenarm on the northeast coast of Northern Ireland. At least 15 of the 24 kites had survived their first winter.

Feeding behaviour

During the summer the kites feed mostly on rabbits, corvids, pigeons, mice and voles. Other prey items noted at nests included gulls, an immature Shag, flat fish, Hedgehog and rats. Though most food is taken as carrion, kites will hunt mice, voles, young crows and young pigeons. During the spring, kites are often seen over lambing fields. The afterbirths are a very rich food source. In Wales, where kites are well known, shepherds will testify to the fact that not a single lamb has been killed by kites in living memory. Kites were noted hawking Crane Flies and other flying insects in the autumn.

Breeding

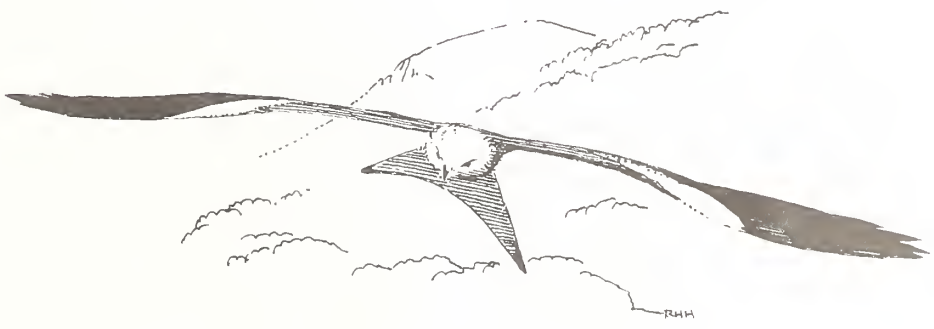
The Scottish Red Kites had a very good breeding season, despite the prolonged winter in the Highlands. Most breeding females had to endure several days of heavy snow during early incubation. A total of 8 pairs laid 23 eggs with a mean clutch size of 2.86. Six successful nests hatched 16 young, 13 of which were wing tagged and fledged (2.16 young per successful pair). Another 3 pairs, of second year males and first year females, built nests or added nest material to old nests but did not breed. Two older males also built nests, but remained single for the third year in succession. A further 3 second year males were seen displaying and defending territories from late April till late May.

All adult kites that used the communal roost throughout the winter have been located on territory; 13 of the 16 territorial males used the winter (Nov-Feb) roost frequently. 7 of the 11 paired females visited the roost constantly. No first year pairs were observed occupying a territory this year, compared with three territorial first year pairs in 1993. Wing-tagged first year kites were tracked to areas south of Inverness and one first year kite was seen to the north during the early summer.

Some pairs in 1994 became accustomed to regular human disturbance. Nests were located over a driveway, along a well used footpath, at the rear of a village and at the end of a garden. They nested in al types of woods and a variety of tree species, though Scots Pines have predominated.

Sightings

The organisers hope to build a comprehensive picture of the Red Kite population over the coming years. This depends largely on reports from birdwatchers throughout Scotland and beyond. All sightings of pairs, singles, dead birds or even rumours of Red Kites should be passed on to Lorcan O Toole at the **RSPB Office, Etive House, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW.** Look for coloured wing tags on any kite you see. Colours used to date are Orange 1989, Blue 1990, Yellow 1991, Lime Green 1992 and Red 1993. In 1994 all wild bred chicks were given white wing tags with a black number or letter.



Red Kite *Angus Hogg*

Raptor Roundup 1994

The Scottish Raptor Study Groups continue to achieve an impressive level of monitoring of Scotland's birds of prey and are looked on as the model to follow by many such groups in the rest of the UK. This is a summary of some of their work in 1994.

The overall weather pattern was of yet another cold, wet spring followed by a dry summer. This seems to have adversely affected some early nesting species but allowed those breeding later to be more productive than usual. Local factors, of course, did not always allow this trend to be universal.

Most species can broadly be said to be doing well with some obvious black spots such as the Hen Harrier which is still dogged by severe persecution on many grouse moors. Even successful birds like the Peregrine give cause for concern in parts of their range - in Shetland for instance it must now be regarded extinct as a breeding species.

The Buzzard continues its re-colonisation of former lowland habitats in eastern Scotland. This trend is highlighted by a marked increase in reports of buzzard persecution from these areas - interference as yet at a level that the birds can absorb but about which we must not get complacent.

The re-introduced Red Kite seems to have gained a small but sustainable toe-hold in the Highlands and is featured in the Roundup for the first time. That other re-introduction - the White-tailed Eagle - has not expanded as quickly as was hoped and more birds are currently being brought in from Norway. The bird that re-introduced itself - the Osprey - had an excellent season and southern Scotland eagerly awaits its first breeding pair.

Peregrine

North East Scotland RSG (Jon Hardy)

Although markedly better than 1993 this was a generally poor year for North East Peregrines. While productivity was reasonable from successful pairs, site occupancy was low and many failed after laying. Productivity was 1.1 chick per laying pair, 1.9 per successful pair. The 19 coastal sites were less productive than the inland birds with only four of the 13 occupied sites producing young. This coastal population is nevertheless still expanding. In all, from 64 occupied sites out of a possible maximum of 118, 31 successful pairs produced at least 58 chicks.

Central RSG (Patrick Stirling-Aird)

Central Group Peregrines - including a number of sites in Dunbartonshire and northern Lanarkshire - had a similar overall performance to that of 1993. Twenty two occupied sites were identified with a further possible pair at one other site. Eleven pairs were proved to breed successfuly and raised 27 chicks between them - 2.5 per successful pair. Stirlingshire was the least productive area with only three of the 12 territorial pairs proved to raise chicks to fledging.

Tayside RSG (Keith Brockie, Ron Lawie, Patrick Stirling-Aird)

Generally a good season for Tayside's Peregrines with at least 107 young fledged from a minimum of 60 pairs attempting to breed. Each successful pair produced a average of 2.0 chicks, East Perthshire doing best with 2.3 and Angus managing only 1.4.

Argyll RSG (Dave Anderson, Arthur French)

As in 1993, Argyll sites were not systematically surveyed, although coverage was good on the Cowal peninsula. Five of fifteen pairs monitored succeeded in raising at least 17 young between them. Although successful pairs were very productive - at least 3.4 young per pair - there was a high rate of failure overall with two thirds of occupying pairs not succeeding. This is not untypical of west coast sites.

Highland RSG (Colin Crooke)

Eggs were laid at 21 out of the 25 sites checked and 17 of these succeeded in getting young away. There were 2.6 chicks produced per successful nest - 2.1 per pair laying. Whilst it is probable that this generally good performance was typical of the Region the Group are concerned at the relatively small number of pairs checked and hope to increase this in 1995. The far north west was typically less productive than other parts (eg a mean of 2.0 chicks per successful pair in Sutherland) whereas East Inverness achieved a mean of 3.0.

Lewis & Harris RSG (Alison Rothwell)

Only one of the two occupied peregrine sites on Lewis and Harris fledged young. Two chicks were raised - only a very slight improvement on 1993 when only one young bird was produced.

Peregrine *W S Paton*

Uists RSG (Paul Boyer)

Eight occupied peregrine sites were found on the Uists. The six eyries where the final outcome was known all raised chicks producing 11 young between them. This is a reasonable performance by Western Isles standards.

South Strathclyde RSG (Dick Roxburgh)

1994 was the most productive year to date for Peregrines in South West Scotland and South Strathclyde played its part in this with at least 32 chicks from the 13 successful nests - an average of at least 2.5 young per successful nest. Human interference remains significant in the area accounting for more than half the known failures. Coastal sites were marginally less productive than those inland.

Persecution accounted for all the human induced failures except one where egg-collecting is suspected. For the first time in many years no failures were attributed to the activities of illegal falconers. The highest level of natural failure was in the Berwickshire coastal population.

Orkney(Eric Meek)

Although generally less successful than in mainland Scotland, Orkney Peregrines have not suffered declines on the scale that their counterparts in Shetland have experienced. Fourteen of the 29 sites checked held pairs and of these at least five were successful, raising a minimum of nine young. The outcome at four of the occupied sites was not discovered. Confirmed productivity was slightly higher than in 1993 so the species is perhaps holding its own on Orkney.

Central RSG (Roger Broad, Dave Dick, Don MacCaskill)

By its own usual standards 1994 was a good year for Central eagles. At least eight and possibly all of the nine home ranges checked were occupied. At least four pairs were successful, possibly five, raising a minimum of five chicks to fledging. The 1.3 chicks per successful pair is as good as this area ever achieves but the suspected robbery of a chick from one site spoiled the story somewhat.

Tayside RSG (Keith Brockie, Dave Dick, Ron Lawie)

Productivity in the east of the Region was, typically, higher than in the west but overall, at 1.2 chicks per successful nest, it equalled that of 1993. Thirteen chicks fledged from 11 successful nests, 16 pairs having originally laid eggs. Although a similar number of pairs were holding territory in the east and west parts of the Region, nearly twice as many pairs attempted to breed in the east as did in the west, possibly an illustration of variation in habitat quality.

Peregrine

Sites	NE	Cent	Tay	D&G	S.St.	B&L	Hghl	Ork	Shet	L&Har	Uist
Checked	58	27	76	-	-	-	25	29	-	3	-
Birds present	52	22	68	75	22	52	22	14	0	2	8
Laid	37	-	-	62	19	50	21	5+	0	-	-
Hatched	-	-	-	-	-	-	19	-	0	-	-
Fledged	22	11+	39+	47	13	31	17	5+	0	1	6+
Young fledged	-	27+	107+	87/90+	32+	81	44+	9+	0	2	11+

Dumfries & Galloway RSG (Chris Rollie, Dick Roxburgh)

The pattern in South Strathclyde was reflected here but on a larger scale. This is an important Region for the Peregrine with between 87 and 90 (minimum) chicks produced from 47 successful sites (an average of at least 1.9 per successful nest - 1.5 per pair laying). Productivity per successful pair did not increase greatly from the 1993 figure but the number of failures was substantially reduced so that more birds fledged than ever before recorded. Although actual instances of human interference were reduced, they accounted for 47% of the failures.

Borders & Lothian RSG (George Carse)

Whilst the amount of human interference and the number of natural failures was very similar in 1994 to that recorded in 1993, site occupancy and productivity were well up so that the area produced a record-breaking 81 chicks. Fifty out of 52 territorial pairs laid eggs with 31 of them going on to produce young. 2.6 chicks were produced per successful pair, 1.6 per pair attempting.

Shetland (Pete Ellis)

Sadly, the two chicks that fledged in 1993 may well prove to be the last raised in Shetland for some time to come for in 1994 only one territorial adult was recorded. The Peregrine must now be regarded as extinct as a breeding species on the Shetland Islands.

Golden Eagle

North East Scotland RSG (Robert Rae)

North East Scotland continues to be one of the most important and productive areas for Golden Eagles. Eleven pairs laid eggs in 1994, two fewer than in the previous year, with seven breeding successfully (eight in 1993). Although they were marginally more productive - 1.4 chicks per successful pair (1.3 in 1993) - the ten chicks produced did not quite match 1993's figure of 11 young fledged. The 16 territorial pairs were reckoned to be occupying all the currently viable home ranges. Failed sites tended to be those at higher altitudes but failure at one site was attributed to persecution.

Argyll RSG (Roger Broad, Mike Gregory)

Eighteen out of 31 pairs that laid eggs were successful and raised 20 chicks - 1.1 chick per successful pair, 0.6 per pair laying, 0.4 per territorial pair. This was a slightly less productive year than 1993 but a typical performance for Argyll.

Highland RSG (Jeff Watson)

Slightly fewer home ranges (68) were checked in 1994 compared with the previous year (72) but 30 successful pairs were monitored in both seasons. Thirty four chicks fledged compared to 39 in 1993, a slightly poorer year, with eastern sites faring better than those in the west.

Lewis & Harris RSG (Alison Rothwell)

A survey of 22 home ranges identified six successful pairs of eagles who raised a total seven chicks. Harris had the only twins recorded in the Western Isles.

Uists RSG (Paul Boyer)

Although coverage was lower than for previous years the sample obtained suggests an average season for Western Isles Golden Eagles. Nine out of 15 occupied territories were monitored through the season and six of these succeeded in producing a chick.

Highland RSG (Bob Swann)

Fewer Highland sites were monitored than in 1993 so the slight drop recorded in overall productivity may not be significant. 1994 was reckoned in any case to be a better than average year. Twenty six successful nests produced 83 young, an average of 3.2 per successful pair, 2.5 per pair laying. Strathspey was, typically, more productive than any other part of the Region monitored. The seven nests found there produced 3.3 chicks per successful pair (3.3 per pair laying).

Golden Eagle

Sites	L&Har	Uist	Cent	Tay	Arg	Highl	NE
Checked	22	-	9	33	55	68	18
Birds present	-	15	8+	23	48	-	16
Laid	-	-	4+	16	31	-	11+
Hatched	-	-	4+	-	23	-	11+
Fledged	6	6+	4	11	18	30	7
Young fledged	7	6+	5+	13	20	34	10

Merlin

North East Scotland RSG (Graham Rebecca)

Although the data from North East Group's Merlin monitoring are not yet fully collated the figures so far available suggest that the birds had a reasonably good time, reflecting the very dry conditions in the latter part of the season. Fifty pairs were found occupying the 80 or so territories checked. Data for 30 pairs in Kincardine and Deeside and in Donside show 2.1 chicks raised per successful pair with at least 2.0 chicks per territorial pair.

Tayside RSG (Ron Downing, Wendy Mattingley)

After two increasingly poor years 1994 saw an upturn in the fortunes of Tayside's Merlins. At least 105 chicks fledged from 32 successful nests. Average number of chicks per successful site was a minimum of 3.3 with the smaller Angus population being more productive (3.6) than the Perthshire pairs (3.2). Like other later nesting species Tayside Merlins seem to have benefited from the generally more settled weather of the latter part of the season.

Argyll RSG (Roger Broad)

Argyll is not a Merlin stronghold but recent efforts for the national survey have given a better picture of the species's status. Nine of the ten sites checked in various mainland and island locations were occupied and at least seven of these raised between 16 and 21 chicks between them. This suggests a generally good season although the sample size is rather small to draw firm conclusions from.

Lewis & Harris RSG (Alison Rothwell)

Seventeen sites were found occupied from which nine pairs eventually raised 26 young. This is a productivity rate of 2.9 chicks per successful nest, 1.6 per territorial pair.

South Strathclyde RSG (Dick Roxburgh)

A minimum of 48 Merlins fledged in South Strathclyde in 1994 from 19 successful nests, with at least 24 pairs attempting to breed initially. Productivity per successful pair averaged 2.5 chicks (2 chicks per known pair attempting). This is a similar rate to 1993, rather poorer than much of the rest of Scotland, but with productivity per pair present considerably increased, the actual number of birds produced was accordingly greater. The Forest Edge Survey, funded by Forest Enterprise, was repeated for a second year in both South Strathclyde and Dumfries and Galloway. With around 800 kilometres of edge examined the overall level of monitoring was thereby greatly increased.

Dumfries & Galloway RSG (Chris Rollie)

Overall numbers of chicks were up on 1993 with at least 30 produced from 11 successful pairs out of 20 occupied territories (22 produced from 10 successful pairs out of 18 occupied territories in 1993). This gives an average of 2.7 chicks per successful nest (2.1 in 1993) and 2.7 per known pair attempting (1.8 in 1993). As with South Strathclyde and despite the improvement on the previous year productivity is still lower than many other parts of Scotland.

Borders & Lothian RSG (Alan Heavisides)

1994 was distinctly more productive than the previous year. Searches in hitherto uncovered parts of the south of Borders region revealed at least eight new territories. These, together with the uplands regularly covered by the study, produced 64 young, most of which were ringed. Overall productivity was 3.2 chicks per successful pair, 2.2 per pair laying. At least nine pairs lost clutches or broods to predation.

Orkney (Eric Meek)

Although all 53 known sites were checked only eight nests were located from 14 sites showing signs of occupancy. Despite the marked fall in both site occupancy and number of nests, overall numbers produced (between 17 and 19 from 32 chicks hatched) were similar to 1993. Predation of well-grown young by Great Skuas on Hoy was recorded for the first time.

Shetland (Pete Ellis)

Shetland produced at least 51 young Merlins from 13 successful nests, 23 pairs having laid eggs (3.9 chicks per successful nest, 2.2 per pair laying). This relatively high productivity - low site occupancy notwithstanding - is a very similar performance to that of 1993.

Osprey

(Roy Dennis, Colin Crooke, Keith Duncan, Keith Brockie, Bradley Yule, Roger Broad)

Scotland's Ospreys flourish with continued in-filling and moderate range expansion. The number of occupied territories creeps towards the 100 mark with 95 pairs in residence in 1994. Eighty three laid eggs and 71 clutches hatched. Sixty nine of these fledged producing an impressive 146 young. 1994 was the most productive year of the decade so far both in terms of production rate and of absolute numbers fledged - a 31% increase on 1993.

Merlin Sites	L&Har	NE	Tay	D&G	S.St	B&L	Hghl	Ork	Shet
Checked	-	c.80	123	-	-	-	53	-	-
Birds present	17	50	55	20	29	35	-	14	24
Laid	-	30+	48	11	24	29	33	8+	23
Hatched	-	30+	-	-	-	24	-	-	-
Fledged	9	30+	32	11	19	20	26	8+	13
Young fledged	26	63+	105+	3+	48+	64	83	17/19	51+

Tayside RSG (Keith Brockie, Bradley Yule

Although Tayside can usually expect to exceed the overall Osprey productivity of Scotland as a whole this was not the case in 1994. The average production of Tayside's nests was 2.1 per successful pair (2.1 for Scotland as a whole) but only 1.3 per pair laying (1.8 overall) and 1.1 per occupied site (1.5). A modest expansion nevertheless continues and new nests are located further south each year. Twenty eight Tayside sites were occupied in 1993 - 30% of the Scottish population - with the 14 successful pairs producing 30 young, making this the most important population outside the Highlands.

Hen Harrier

Tayside RSG (Bruce Anderson, Ron Downing)

Tayside Hen Harriers improved on their 1993 performance with improved late season weather contributing to this. At least 66 young fledged from 27 nests in Perthshire but only one chick was recorded fledging in Angus from the single occupied site discovered. In view of the seeming high quality of the habitat in Angus it seems very likely that high levels of persecution play some part in this picture.

Highland RSG (Brian Etheridge)

Analysis of the breeding performance at the 51 nests monitored in 1994 reveals significant patterns when the study area is divided between keepered moor and un-keepered moor. On the un-keepered ground that lies mainly in the north and west 60 chicks fledged from 17 successful nests out of 23 nests with eggs. On the keepered ground, mostly to the south and east, only 18 chicks flew from eight successful nests out of 28 nests with eggs. Direct persecution thus appears to be significantly affecting breeding success.

South Strathclyde RSG (Ricky Gladwell, Chris Rollie)

Of 28 occupied South Strathclyde Hen Harrier sites, 16 failed to produce young, although eggs were proven at 25 of them. Fourteen of these failures were attributed to direct human persecution. Despite this high level of interference the ten successful nests fledged 37 chicks showing the potential for good productivity when there is no deliberate nest destruction.

Dumfries & Galloway RSG (Chris Rollie)

A very similar number of Hen Harrier nests was located in Dumfries and Galloway as was found in South Strathclyde - 26 occupied territories, 25 females proven to lay. In marked contrast to its northern neighbour, however, only one nest failure was attributed to persecution so that, despite a further nine natural failures, the 17 nests that succeeded produced 58 chicks.

Argyll RSG (Mike Madders)

Hen Harriers had a poor time in Mike Madders's study areas in Argyll and Bute. Laying started late but despite good clutch sizes and high vole numbers losses at around hatch time were very high. Only 58% of laying pairs produced young. Eighty five young were reared to fledging by 31 successful pairs who thus achieved only 2.7 chicks per nest. Persecution is not a factor in the Argyll population so the failures are entirely natural.

Orkney (Eric Meek)

Marginal improvements on the 1993 season still left Orkney with another bad year for breeding Hen Harriers. Although up to 39 females occupied 33 sites, mostly on Mainland, and although at least 28 nests were built, 22 nests failed during incubation. The six remaining nests did produce at least 16 young - 2.7 chicks per successful female but only 0.6 per nest with eggs. Food supply failures, possibly outside the breeding season, have been suggested as a possible explanation. Whatever the case this is one area where poor Hen Harrier breeding success is not attributable to human persecution.

Buzzard

Highland RSG (Malcolm Harvey)

Highland Group report the monitoring of Buzzards over a wide area including in Bob Swann's study area in Easter Ross. From 72 pairs monitored 66 laid eggs and 54 nests reached the chick stage. Fifty two broods fledged - 100 chicks leaving the nest in total. Productivity per territorial pair averaged 1.3 in Easter Ross, where 61 chicks were recorded fledging, with 1.4 chicks produced per pair laying and 1.8 per successful pair. Samples from the other areas are mostly too low to risk drawing conclusions about productivity.

Buzzard *Jim Young*

Borders & Lothian RSG (George Smith)

George Smith's task of monitoring Buzzard re-colonisation in the Lothians gets harder as the population continues to expand. In 1994 22 pairs were confirmed breeding producing a minimum of 37 chicks with one nest shot out at egg stage. This is an increase of ten confirmed pairs. A further 11 territorial pairs were located which probably bred but the precise outcome was unknown. Six of these were new. This suggests an overall expansion in the Lothian Buzzard population of about 80% from the previous year.

Red Kite

Highland RSG (Lorcan O'Toole)

Six incubating Red Kites successfully endured several days of heavy snowfall to produce a total of 16 young. Two other pairs failed at egg stage and a further three pairs built nests but took the matter no further. In addition there were other nest-building individual birds. These are still very small numbers but Kite workers are optimistic for this species.

A more detailed account of the encouraging progress being made by the Red Kite reintroduction programme can be found on page 7.

Kestrel

Ayrshire (Gordon Riddle)

A sustained peak in vole populations resulted in the highest clutch sizes ever recorded in Gordon's long-term study. Average clutch size from 22 clutches was 5.5 with 11 clutches of 6 and one of 7. Poor early season weather contributed to a 33% loss of clutches but the better weather in the latter part of the season helped ensure 88% brood survival. Seventy three young were eventually ringed from 16 broods. Three ringed birds from early seasons were recovered, all in south west Scotland. A new development was the predation of adults at nest box sites attributed to Goshawks. Goshawks were implicated in the failures of six sites at two different study areas. Overall productivity was high with 3.2 chicks per breeding attempt, 4.5 per successful nest.

Highland RSG (Mick Canham)

In contrast to Gordon Riddle's Ayrshire study areas the mean clutch size of 24 Highland Kestrels was 4.9, the lowest on record. Despite the apparently poor vole numbers the birds nevertheless achieved reasonable overall breeding success with average brood sizes.

Keith Morton

A ground nesting Kestrel - with the male at the nest *Arthur Gilpin*

OBITUARY
William Austin 1911-1995

Willie Austin died peacefully at his home in Dumfries on the 5th of March. He was held in great affection by a host of friends. Although always intensely loyal to his home town and the countryside of Dumfries and Galloway, he probably had as many close friends in England as in Scotland and many of his happiest times were spent in the bird-rich county of Norfolk where he always made new friends. His holidays at Cley rarely failed to be voted by him "the best yet". He also greatly enjoyed birdwatching holidays in France with Bobby Smith and others and Majorca with Arthur Smith.

Willie was a communicator. For many years his extra-mural classes in Ornithology attracted devoted audiences and through them and his long-running nature articles in *The Dumfries and Galloway Standard* he did more than anyone else to increase the popularity of bird watching in his native area. His enthusiasm led to the SOC gaining a great many new members. On those never to be forgotten Goose-watching weekends when the SOC filled the County Hotel in Dumfries, Willie was always at the heart of the fray, taking endless trouble to put everyone at ease. He greatly enjoyed leading a long line of packed cars to Caerlaverock, Southerness and the Stewartry Lochs, pointing out the special Solway birds that he knew so well. He took his responsibilities seriously and was especially solicitous of the needs of the elderly on cold winter days - the toilets at Carlingwark car park were just as important as identifying duck on the loch. Someone recalled to me the other day how he remembered Willie telling some elderly newcomers that "the black ones are Coots and the coloured ones are Wigeon". Basic tuition in ornithology if you like but just what some people wanted. He was also in demand as a leader of National Trust for Scotland parties. Courteous to those he felt needed help, Willie could be dismissive of the brash and over confident. At times he carried his scepticism too far and if someone he didn't know reported a rare bird his instant reaction was disbelief. He was a complex character, an unusual combination of shrewdness and innocence. Perhaps he was especially loved by his true friends because they sometimes had to laugh at him as well as with him.

As a young man Willie worked in his father's firm, John Carlton and Sons, agricultural suppliers. He was in his element visiting

The late Willie Austin - taken during a birdwatching trip to Glencaple 1990 - the wooden bollard in the background is one of the old bollards used to tie up ships on the Solway.

Bobby Smith

farms and taking orders in the farm kitchen in a leisurely manner. He was less happy when the firm was taken over by Scottish Agricultural Industries and there was less room for the personal touch. Wisely he took very early retirement and was fortunate in being able to continue to live comfortably and devote his time to his many interests. Some who ready this may be surprised to know that, until the 1950s, he was a leading figure in Scottish cricket his forte being on the organising side, and for a number of years he wrote about cricket in Scotland for Wisden, the prestigious annual publication on cricket. He was proud of having been a guest at the famous Long Room at Lords' cricket ground. For years he was Secretary of Dumfries Cricket Club and captained the 2nd XI, once rashly persuading me to play for his team, when I discovered that dropping a catch was an even more serious matter than misidentifying a bird.

Willie never married. His bachelor house on the green fringe of Dumfries was always neat and orderly and friends from far and wide were made welcome. He loved to show them his fine collection of natural history books and the bird paintings he had acquired over the years. A visitor was as likely to find him reading a classic novel or a meaty biography as the latest bird journal and it was sometimes difficult to know which way to turn as Willie handed you a succession of articles and books which had taken his fancy. He spent many hours listening enthralled to recordings of classical music and used often to drive to Edinburgh at festival time to attend concerts.

He had some lifelong antipathies. He abhorred shooting, egg collecting and even falconry. He refused to attend an SOC Conference in 1959 because a guest speaker was the actor and falconer James Robertson Justice, and shunned, conferences at Dunblane Hydro after he had been told that the new owners might be offering potted passerine birds on the menu!

I think Willie's favourite birds were geese, waders and passerines. He had many heroes among writers and naturalists, Hudson, John Clare, Thomas Hardy: James Fisher, Maury Meiklejohn, and perhaps above all, Julian Huxley, whose humanist philosophy he shared. He once told me that he had a treasured memory of a day spent as a youngster walking the Galloway hills with Ivor Brown, the writer and sometime editor of *The Observer*. He certainly dreamed of a full-time writing career for himself.

In the last year or two he had become rather frail hut his loyal friends, Jan Donnan, Bobby Smith, the Skillings and others visited his frequently at home and accompanied him on outings to his favourite haunts. He will be remembered for the warmth of his personality, for his passionate concern for the natural world and especially for his ability to communicate this to others. Long after he completed his time as Chairman of the Dumfries branch of the SOC he continued to exert a major influence among bird watchers in the region.

Donald Watson

REVIEWS

Birds of Britain and Europe with North Africa & the Middle East. *Hermann Heinzel, Richard Fitter & John Parslow. Collins. 1995. 384pp. £9.99 ISBN 0-00-219894-0*

Opinions differ as to the "best" field guide probably because there is no such book! This one first appeared in 1972 and has been through four editions and many reprints since them. This is the most complete revamp to date - most plates have been repainted, more species are dealt with and there are extra illustrations to help with difficult groups such as raptors, terns and wheatears. This guide has always had the advantage of covering a greater area than its main competitors. However the extra coverage means less information per species and this is exacerbated in this edition, especially with distribution. This is only dealt with in the maps, some of them very small and difficult to read. The section on 240 'regular' British species that featured at the back of the original edition has had to be dropped.

There is nothing else available that covers so much in such a compact format - even if you own an older edition you should seriously consider updating.

Stan da Prato

If you are buying a new edition of a field guide consider donating your old one to Russian ornithologists via ***Geoffrey Harper, 19/3 Warriston Road, Edinburgh EH7 4HN.***

Behaviour and Evolution. *Edited by P J B Slater and T R Halliday. Cambridge University Press. Hardback £37.50 ISBN 0 521 41858 5 Softback £16.95 ISBN 0 521 42923 4.*

Behaviour and Evolution contains eight papers which explore the link between animal behaviour and theories of evolution. Examples from the world of birds are scattered throughout the book. The chapter on behaviour and speciation recalls some of the discussions on "what is a species" at the last SOC Conference. This is a serious book which will benefit students of biology, but may interest others with a scientific background. It might help explain some examples of bird behaviour we all witness when out in the field watching birds, such as how the complex mating behaviour of ducks might have evolved.

Mark Holling.

Bird Life of Woodland and Forest *by R J Fuller, 244pp illustrated with black & white photographs and line drawings. £24.95 ISBN 0-521-331188.*

This is a very well written and interesting book, that pulls together a very wide range of references, many from the authors own work carried out for the BTO over the last 20 years. The book gives a historical overview of Britain's woodland environment with wider European perspectives. It goes on to examine how birds use woodlands and their abundance and distribution within woods. Despite the lack of work carried out in conifers, Rob manages to give it equal prominence along side the better researched broad leaved woodlands, reflecting the changing face of Britain's woodland resource.

I feel almost able to recommend this book on Chris Rose's artwork alone, his black and white illustrations are perhaps the finest I've seen and bring the book to life in ways other artists could not.

My only reservation is the cost. At £25 it may be prohibitively expensive for some, which is unfortunate because everyone with an interest in woodland birds should read it.

Peter Cosgrove

Birds of Russia *by Algirdas Knystautas. Harper Collins. 256pp. £19.99 ISBN 000-219-913-0*

The "Russia" of the title is misleading as the book refers to the whole of the former Soviet Union and over 800 species are covered.

The bulk of the book is taken up by the systematic review. Each species typically has from a couple of lines to a paragraph, but up to a page for "special" birds such as endemics. Some indication of habitat, distribution and abundance is usually given; often breeding biology is touched on. Sometimes you come across and an evocative gem, eg the page on the Chinese Merganser. Some 270 species are illustrated in colour plates, mostly excellent, and there are 70 black and white photos and five distribution maps. There is a separate chapter on movements.

If you are thinking of visiting the former Soviet Union this book should be a great help in planning a trip. Armchair travellers should enjoy it too.

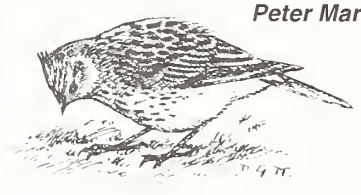
Peter Vandome

Crows and Jays; a Helm Identification Guide *by Steve Madge and Hilary Burn. 191pp, £25.95 ISBN 0-7136-3999-7*

One of the latest volumes in a now familiar series this book covers 120 species of Crows, Jays and Magpies and is divided into two main parts. The first consists of 30 beautifully detailed colour plates by Hilary Burn, depicting all the species described in the main text. These are accompanied by distribution maps and a summary of basic identification criteria. The second part, by Steve Madge, comprises a detailed description of each species under standard sub-headings. It also contains a list of references cited in the bibliography.

The description of this series as identification guides is somewhat misleading. Essential reference material, yes, but hardly the type of book the keen birdwatcher would take into the field. Two features of the book are poor: the bibliography is crammed into two pages, badly arranged and requires a good magnifying glass to read. The index is similarly cramped. These faults, and the narrow page margins, are consistent throughout the series and somewhat mar an otherwise fine set of books.

Peter Marriott



Skylark *David Mitchell*

Birds in Wales by Roger Lovegrove, Graham Williams and Iolo Williams. T & A D Poyser, London 1994. 371pp £28 hardback. ISBN 0-85661-069-0

This was planned as a companion volume to Valerie Thom's "Birds in Scotland", being the first attempt to produce an authoritative account of birds in Wales. It includes short chapters on the country's physical characteristics, bird habitats and history of bird recording. Emphasis is placed on the increase in sheep farming with its enormous impact on farmland and moorland birds. The species accounts follow the sequence and nomenclature given by Voous in 1977 and include species accepted by the BBRC. The accounts indicate the historical as well as the more recent status of each species, the main wintering areas and breeding locations. The text is supported by maps, graphs and bird illustrations for some species. A useful reference book.

Joan Wilcox

Moult and Ageing of European Passerines, *by Lukas Jenni and Rafael Winkler. Academic Press Ltd., London 1994. 224pp. £40.00 ISBN 0-12-384150-X.*

This is a superbly produced, large format (31 x 23 cm) reference work which succeeds on both academic and aesthetic levels. It is complementary to Svensson's (1992) pocket-sized guide, which is used largely in the field by ringers. This book deals with only 58 species, with a bias to Central Europe, but in great detail. Data were collected from an estimated 140,000 birds at ringing stations in Switzerland, Italy and at the Basel Natural History Museum. Of the 480 or so full-colour photographs of extended wings - the showpiece of the book - only about 20 are from the museum collection.

The book is in two main parts. The first provides a comprehensive statement of the moult strategies and sequences adopted by European passerines in general, and relates these to their ecological adaptations. Six moult strategies for adults, and 15 moult cycles for first-year birds are identified, which some may find surprising. Part two is the species accounts, and the meat of the book. Following part two come a seven page section on the recognition, and use in ageing, of skull pneumatization in first-autumn birds; and nine pages of references round off this magnum opus on passerine moult.

Tom Dougall

Helm Identification Guides - Terns of Europe and North America *by Klaus Malling Olson and Hans Larsson. 1995. Christopher Helm, A & C Black, London. 224pp. £24.99 hardback. ISBN 0-7136-4056-1.*

The outstanding feature of this book is its great number of excellent paintings by H. Larsson and photographs by various photographers, illustrating a remarkable range of plumages of all European and North American terns both standing and in flight. Geographical variation, subspecies, and hybrids are covered. Distribution maps and "quick keys to identification" are given for each species. There are mistakes in sentence construction, wrong words (sort-distance for short-distance, McGuihan for McGuigan) and wrong picture numbering on p79, but for tern watchers a useful book.

Harry Dott

A Birdwatcher's Guide to Qatar *by Christine Oldfield and John Oldfield. Privately printed; 111pp ,1994; softback; £8.50. ISBN 99921-65-10-3*

This gives very clear directions to all the bird birding spots. While there are a mere 25 resident species of breeding birds, the great interest lies in the 250 species of passage migrants and winter visitors. There are numerous useful sketch maps, and pleasant illustrations in colour by Catriona Day. Available from **John Oldfield, 21 Learmonth Gardens, Edinburgh EH4 1HA.**

W G Harper.

MEMBERS' REQUESTS

Colour marked Greylag Geese

Over 150 Icelandic Greylag Geese were caught in the autumn in Highland Region as part of a joint study carried out by members of the Highland Ringing Group and Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust. All birds have been dyed on their tails. In addition either a darvic ring or neck collar has been added. These have two letters which can be read from the base upwards.

Sightings of Greylags bearing dye marks, darvic rings or neck collars, together with details of colour and letters seen (no matter how incomplete), should be sent to: **Brian Etheridge, Morven, Station Road, Avoch, Ross-shire IV9 8RW. Telephone: 01381-620098 (home) or 01463-715000 (work)**

Colour ringed Mute Swans - Lothian & Fife

Colour ringing of Mute Swans has taken place in Lothian since 1982 and Fife since 1991. This has resulted in nearly 2000 birds being ringed, primarily breeding adults and cygnets caught in August prior to fledging. A considerable amount of data has been gathered on movements, survival, return to natal areas to breed etc. Lothian birds have been found to be very mobile prior to pairing and establishing a territory, with sightings from locations such as Berwick, Montrose, Glasgow and Ayr. Although many observations are received on ringed birds there seems little doubt that birds are overlooked or are assumed to have been recorded. Many birds can go unrecorded for 3-4 years then reappear in our study area; indeed one bird recently was re-sighted after an absence of 7 years! We would be very pleased, therefore, to receive sightings of colour ringed Mute Swans both within Lothian and Fife and from elsewhere in Scotland. All reports will be acknowledged and ringing details forwarded to the observer.

Our study at present uses White Darvic rings with three black letters read from the foot upwards and usually on the left leg; the usual metal BTO ring is on the right leg. We may be using pale green rings with black letters this summer. Sightings should be sent to **Allan & Lyndesay Brown, 61 Watt's Gardens, Cupar, Fife, KY15 4UG (Telephone 01334 656804)** from whom further information can be obtained on the study. Colour ringing schemes are taking place in other parts of Scotland and Northern England, the English birds carrying Blue or Red rings. Any records for these birds will be forwarded to the appropriate organiser.

Look out for Goosanders

10 Goosanders have been given a pink wing tag on the left wing on the Eden Estuary, Fife in August 1994. In addition a single male Red-breasted Merganser was tagged on the right wing with a blue tag. Records of any of these birds or of Goosanders tagged in previous years with blue (1992) or red (1993) tags on their left wings would be very much appreciated. They have been tagged by the Tay Ringing Group on behalf of Dr Mick Marquiss of the Institute of Terrestial Ecology. Any sightings should be reported to **Les Hatton, North East Fife Ranger Service, Craigtoun Country Park, St. Andrews, Fife KY16 8NX; Tel. 0334 472151** All records will be acknowledged.

Goosander - look out for wing-tagged birds *Mike Ashley*

Wing tagged Hen Harriers

Marked birds are carrying a coloured tag on each wing. Although the colour on each wing may be different a single letter or number is repeated on each tag. Details of any sightings however incomplete should be sent to **Brian Etheridge, RSPB North Scotland Office, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW tel 0463 715000** as soon as possible.

Colour ringed Ring Ouzels

A study by David Arthur of Ring Ouzels in Glen Esk, Angus, is now in its third year. A number of birds have been individually colour ringed and any sightings of colour ringed Ring Ouzels will be greatly appreciated by David. Please contact **David Arthur, 12 Dundee Street, Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7PD. 0241 853356.** All sightings will be acknowledged.

Wing Tagged Sea Eagles

Anybody who sees a wing tagged Sea Eagle should contact either the **RSPB, North Scotland Office, at Etive House, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW. Tel 01463 715000 or Roger Broad, RSPB, West of Scotland Office, Science Park, Glasgow G20 0SP. Tel 0141 945 5224 as soon as possible.**

Colour ringed Stonechats

Over the past four years, approximately 200 birds mainly nestlings, have been colour-ringed at both inland and coastal sites in the Aberdeen area. Evidence suggests that you birds can disperse over considerable distances and I would therefore by very grateful for details of any sightings in Scotland. Note should be made of the colour combination, and which leg bears the metal and which the colour rings. All sightings will be acknowledged by **Andrew Thorpe, 15 Albyn Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 1YP.**

SOC NOTICES

200 Club

Winners for the first quarter of 1995 were:-
January 1st £30 - Miss V Underwood, Glenalmond; 2nd £20 - Miss D R Smith, Stirling; 3rd £10 - D R Stewart, St Andrews.
February 1st £30 - Mrs D L Johnson-Ferguson, Canonbie; 2nd £20 - R Burn, East Kilbride; 3rd £10 - J H Ballantyne, Edinburgh.
March 1st £50 - Miss R M Glen, Edinburgh; 2nd £30 - S Howe, Torphins; 3rd £20 - Mrs D I Melrose, Bankfoot; 4th £10 - R G Allan, Edinburgh.
The seventh year of the 200 Club started on 1 June. A very warm 'thank you' to all members who pay by cheque or cash and who renewed their subscription. If you are one of the very few who did not, you can still send me a cheque for £12 (payable to "SOC 200 Club"); your positive help to the SOC will be greatly appreciated. Also, if you are an SOC member, and over 18, you can still join by sending me a cheque for £12 to cover your membership for the year, and be eligible for all monthly draws to May 1996.
aphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NO (tel. 01896 822 176).

Council Notes

New members to serve on **Council, Management** and **Library Committees** are urgently needed. Nominations with the name of the person and (for Council) signed by a proposer and seconder, should be sent to **21 Regent Terrace**.

A meeting of **Local Recorders** to be organised by the SBRC is planned for 1996.

SOC members interested in forming links with like minded people from other countries should contact the office if willing to co-ordinate such a scheme. If it gets off the ground it could lead to useful birdwatching contacts.

Please check your address!!!

We would be very grateful if members could please check their address and let us know if any corrections are needed by sending the label back with the said corrections detailed. Also if you are willing to let us have your telephone number perhaps you could again state this on the label. Your assistance in this matter would be much appreciated.

This Issue

This SBN has increased from 12 to 16 pages at no extra cost as we have dropped the blue colour - any comments?

Endowment Fund Grants awarded for 1995

D.Hawker - £100 towards travel expenses for work on Rookeries in Dumfries & Galloway.
A.Ramsay - £300 towards rings and travel to look at Manx Shearwaters on Rum and Hirundines in E.Ross.
A.Thorpe - £50 towards continuing work on the study of Stonechats.
B.Taylor - £50 towards travel costs and rings whilst studying the dispersal of Crested Tits.
D.Arthur - £150 towards travel and adminstration costs during the final year of this 3 year project to study Ring Ouzels in Glen Esk.
Lothian Ringing Group - £100 towards the hire of a boat and rings for the monitoring of seabird populations in the Forth
If you would like to apply for a grant from the SOC to assist with any worthwhile project or study please for 1996 please ask for an application form from SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

60th Anniversary

As some members may be aware 1996 is the 60th anniversary of the SOC, and Pamela and myself are keen to try and organise a special celebration which will be open to all members, so if you have any ideas as to what you would like to do please get in touch with us at 21 Regent Terrace.

Some branches may also like to organise a special event locally, again we would like to hear from you. A wine and cheese evening in Edinburgh is planned with some early slides of the Club - member's contributions will be welcome - and we hope to invite some of our oldest members. Among suggestions received from a couple of branches are trips to St. Kilda, Shetland and Fair Isle. Any other ideas? Branches may like to organise a bird race themselves with money raised going to Branch funds.

Scottish Birds

We would like to thank Anne-Marie Smout for the hard work she has put in over the years as Editor of Scottish Birds. Also retiring from the Editorial Panel is Prof. Peter Slater. Prof David Jenkins and Dr Bryan Nelson are staying on to assist the new editor Dr Stan da Prato. Dr Ian Bainbridge joins the Panel. Those wishing to submit papers should continue to send them to **Scottish Birds, c/o 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.**
The club is most grateful to all those members who contribute so much time into its publications.

Winter meetings/Members' Nights

7 September - Tayside
11 September - Grampian, (Keith Brockie)
18 September - Borders and Clyde
19 September - Highland, Lothian and West Galloway.
20 September - Ayrshire, Caithness, Dumfries and Fife.
21 September - Stirling

SOC Annual Raffle

The Fife Branch are again organising the annual raffle, and we would hope that branches and members may like to donate a prize or two. Prizes may either be handed into the office at 21 Regent Terrace or sent to **Brian Downing, 51 Lade Brae, St Andrews KY15 9DA**

1995 Annual Conference

This year's Annual Conference will be held over the weekend 3/5 November 1995 at the Duke of Gordon Hotel in Kingussie. Our guest speaker will be Algirdas Knystautas the author of "The Natural History of the USSR" and "The Birds of Russia". He has also contributed to many TV programmes including the BBC series "The Realm of the Russian Bear". He will be followed by our own members who have visited northern Russia to study the breeding waders and geese or to lead tours for birdwatchers.
The Sunday is focused more locally and includes a talk about the reintroduction of Bears and Beavers to the Highlands! .

Scotland's first birdwatching fair

On the weekend 5/6 August the RSPB's Vane Farm reserve will be the venue for what is anticipated will be the largest event of its kind ever held in Scotland. It will be organised jointly by RSPB and Lizars. Obviously there will be displays and demonstrations of optical equipment and other items of interest to birdwatchers. The SOC will be taking part and assistance will be required during the course of the weekend. We have borrowed display boards from our Stirling branch, and any good photographs of branch activities that can be enlarged will be welcome, to enhance the display planned.

Thanks to

Thanks are due once again to the army of volunteers who willingly come into 21 every quarter and stuff envelopes. The stuffers for the March mailing included:- Rosemary Davidson, Bob & Betty Smith, Frank Hamilton and Joan Wilcox - apologies to anyone who has been missed out.

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BIRD

THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

SEPTEMBER 1995 No. 39
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Edited by Sylvia Laing and Stan da Prato

OCT 1995

The 1995 breeding season in Scotland

As in previous years we stress that this is a rapidly produced summary of fieldworkers' first - and strongest - impressions of the breeding season that wasn't even finished for many birds when we put this article together in mid July. Proper evaluation comes later and we are in no way seeking to preempt the thorough analysis that individual specialists and bodies such as the BTO carry out once all the data is complete. We are most grateful to all those who were good enough to fill in our questionnaire. Its a single piece of paper, designed to be quick and painless to complete! Anyone who feels they would like to join those listed at the end of the article for next year should contact 21 Regent Terrace.

Weather

Always a topic among those who venture into the Scottish outdoors, 1995 struck many correspondents as even more variable than usual with extremes of heat, cold, drought and flood at different stages. March and April were generally cold and wet, with considerable snow on high ground that seems to have particularly affected early breeding species in the uplands. As spring progressed, it became drier than average with a very hot spell in June. By July thunder storms had moved up from the south. The exact effects of all this varied greatly according to local topography, shelter, altitude etc. Insect numbers were high in the latter part of the spring but availability of some invertebrates, such as earth worms, was probably reduced.

Raptors

Golden Eagles did poorly in parts of Perthshire and Central. Although snow on the crags in March did not help there was also evidence of human interference. Peregrines also did badly with comments such as 'disastrous' made in parts of Grampian. However, Peregrines did well in most parts of southeast Scotland. Hen Harriers were also scarce in the southeast and had a poor season further north except in Easter Ross on unkeepered ground in parts of Grampian. The 50% drop in breeding attempts and broods fledged in a Tayside study area was the poorest for 7 years; as this was unkeepered land natural factors must have been responsible unless birds are being killed in winter. Harrier breeding success was not particularly good in Orkney where the remarkable pairing of a male Pallid Harrier with a female Hen Harrier led to eggs, but eventual failure, probably due to predation.

Buzzards continued to expand in several parts of Scotland. This seems largely to be due to reduced persecution. Merlins are less likely to suffer direct human interference than larger raptors. They had

Spotted Flycatcher, a species in decline? *David Mitchell*

their best year in 12 in the Lammermuir hills south of Edinburgh but several fieldworkers further north recorded only average or poor success.

Ospreys always make the news. The activities of egg collectors in 1995 have already been highlighted by the national media. Overall breeding success looks likely to be low; with only two broods of 3 being reported. Kestrels did badly in Galloway due to a crash in the vole population; sightings of Hobbies are now annual in this area and must enliven fieldwork. Though not a raptor, Raven may conveniently be mentioned here; several reports suggest good breeding success, probably due to the abundant carrion at the end of the winter.

Owls

This group is particularly affected by cycles in prey species, notably field voles. Short-eared Owls did well in the Lammermuirs, Orkney and parts of Grampian. In Galloway they were scarce and owls in Easter Ross had below average success. Southwest Scotland is Scotland's stronghold for Barn Owls. A big increase in breeding pairs, mainly due to higher than average survival of young birds, was followed by very poor breeding success; only about half laid eggs and very few chicks were reared due to the timing of the crash in the vole population. Work in northeast Scotland has revealed more Barn Owls there than previously thought; many are on private land where access can be difficult. Long-eared Owls are notoriously secretive but there was evidence of a reasonable season in northeast Scotland, while a pair bred at Vane Farm reserve by Loch Leven after a year's absence.

Gamebirds

We receive rather few reports about these. There was further evidence of decreases at Black Grouse leks in Perthshire and the northeast. Capercaillie were reported to be holding on in small numbers on Donside. The only two reports about Red Grouse suggest a good season in the Lammermuirs but low population levels further north.

Waterbirds

There were encouraging reports, albeit from a few sites, that one of Scotland's rarest and most beautiful birds, the Black throated Diver, did well in 1995. Black-necked Grebes were down at their stronghold on the Loch of Kinnordy; most losses seem to have been due to

Mute Swan with cygnet *Andrew Dowell*

mammalian predators such as Stoats. Little Grebes bred for the first time in the Lochalsh area. There was a small recovery in the number of breeding pairs of Slavonian Grebes in Inverness shire from last year's low ebb. Kingfishers seem to be doing well in the Borders. Dippers were said to be less obvious than usual in the southeast while some broods died in Galloway due to low water levels, which presumably affected their invertebrate food supply.

Mute Swans had a very good season in Fife and Lothian with broods of up to 11 recorded. They are continuing their slow increase on the Lochs of Harray and Stenness in Orkney after the 1991 "pond weed crash". Feral Greylag Geese continue to expand in the Lothians.

Eider are long lived ducks which can withstand several poor breeding seasons. However, on the Ythan, no young at all were produced in 1993 and 1994. This year Fox control led to a dramatic change with c800 ducklings in June with more eggs still to hatch. On the Isle of May c1200 nests represented the highest count ever; hatching success also appears to have been good. However, counts of breeding Eider on other islands in the Firth of Forth indicate fewer attempting to breed there.

Seabirds

Fulmars showed a slight increase on Eynhallow in Orkney where they have been in decline since the mid 1980's. There also appears to have been a slight increase in the Forth of Forth. Inland birds on Benarty Crags above Loch Leven failed again.The reports we have of auks indicate a reasonable year. There were increases in both Razorbill and Guillemot on the Isle of May. Tysties did well on Eynhallow. Shags increased by about 50% on several of the Forth islands. On the Isle of May the adults that failed to breed in 1994 did not reappear in 1995, confirming that the wreck in February 1994 was indeed responsible for that year's crash in breeding numbers. Shag numbers on the May are around a third of what they were the early 1990's. Those birds that did breed had a successful season. Cormorants are increasing on islands off the East Lothian coast.

Kittiwakes seem to have had mixed fortunes. Numbers were said to be up in parts of the northeast, with birds colonising low ledges. Numbers were up on many Forth Islands. Many reports stress that Kittiwakes were late to breed in 1995 On the Isle of May more bred than in 1994 but productivity was relatively low. The accessible colony at Dunbar harbour also had below average productivity with less than 1 chick fledged per complete nest. Terns enjoyed widely varying fortunes in the Firth of Forth. On the Isle of May there were 785 nests, mostly of Arctics but with some Commons, the highest count in recent years. Colonies on the East Lothian coast had another poor season. On Inchmickery, traditionally the Tern capital of the inner Forth, there were only 11 pairs of Common and 5 of Sandwich with another 20 pairs of Sandwich Terns elsewhere in the Forth. Further north, Arctic Terns seem to have had mixed success on different Orkney islands. Sandwich Terns re-established a colony on the Ythan along with Black-headed Gulls. As with Eiders the Terns benefited from Fox control. Such control is an acceptable tool in specific situations where the need for it has been clearly demonstrated. This is quite a different thing to more general attempts to "control" Foxes in the hope that this will automatically benefit birds. Mammalian predation, especially by cats, limited the

success of Common Terns at 2 colonies in Easter Ross. In this area most Arctic Tern colonies failed completely.

Waders

Lapwing are just hanging on in many of the more intensively farmed parts of Scotland. They were reported to have had a good season in some upland areas and also on some fields which had been "set aside" eg in Tayside. Perhaps more worrying is the comment that Lapwing were absent from high ground in Galloway. Other waders seem to have had a reasonable season except Common Sandpipers which were reported down in Borders, Galloway, near Inverness and in the Lammermuir Hills.

Passerines

Seed eating species have been shown to be strongly affected by changes in agriculture (see Page 4). In some areas set aside schemes have helped species such as Goldfinch and Tree Sparrow. Siskins have benefited from afforestation although the lack of Sitka Spruce cones in Galloway Forest Park adversely affected its Siskins and led to a temporary absence of Crossbills this spring.

Most tits seem to have had a good breeding season. There were several reports of increased numbers of Long-tailed Tits from Lothian to the Highlands. The first reports from ringers' Constant Effort Sites indicate high numbers of young songbirds, especially tits. At Culterty several Starlings double brooded which they only do in favourable years.

Of summer visitors Ring Ouzels did well in several upland areas after a poor start due to inclement weather in the early part of the spring. A letter from a shooting person in the national press claimed that Wheatears were down in the hills, suggesting this was linked to an increase in predators. However, Wheatears had a good season in the Lammermuirs and every attempt by SBN's larger editor to scale a hill this spring led to encounters with breeding Wheatears! There is no doubt that we need better data on the common small birds, such as Wheatear and Meadow Pipit, that rarely breed on CBC plots; the new BTO Breeding Bird Survey should help. Stonechats continue their painfully slow recovery in southeast Scotland. There were good numbers of Redstarts in a west Perthshire study area. Redstarts also turned up in many places where they are normally scarce or absent. There were varied reports on hirundines. Several people commented that Swallows seemed to take considerable time between arrival and breeding. There were increases in Sand Martins on the River Nairn and good breeding success on the River Tweed. House Martins were said to be scarcer in parts of the Highlands and Midlothian; one monitored colony in East Lothian showed no change from 1994.

Chiffchaff numbers may have been up; there were certainly many reports of singing birds. In view of the concern expressed by the BTO about Willow Warblers in England we are happy to report that, in Scotland, where so many British Willow Warblers are sensible enough to breed, there is no evidence of decline! It is also good to hear of good numbers of Wood Warblers at a number of sites throughout the Highlands. Common Whitethroats reappeared at Dornoch, Sutherland, after several years absence. Lesser Whitethroats were more more elusive in Lothian, although in Scotland this species often breeds without advertising its presence by singing. Sedge Warblers were said to be down in the Borders, in Mid Lothian and on the River Nairn, but up in Orkney and at Vane Farm and holding their own on the River Devon. Flycatchers had contrasting fortunes. There were more reports of declines in Spotted Flycatcher numbers. However, Pied Flycatchers increased in Galloway and often turned up in unexpected areas; one in Upper Glenalmond was the first record in 18 years there. In a west Perthshire nest box study numbers were up although clutch size was down.

Thanks

Thanks are again due to the following people without whose help this report would not be possible:

Bruce Anderson, Dave Arthur, Bill Brackenridge, Allan Brown, Brian Cosnette, Dave Dick, Paul Doyle, Dave Fairlamb, Ian Francis, Pete Gordon, Sandra Hacker, Nigel Harding, Mike Harris, Malcolm Harvey, Alan Joss, Eric Meek, Donnie Macdonald, Brian Neath, Ian Poxton, Henry Robb, Martin Robinson, Malcolm Ross, RSPB, Steve Sankey, SWT, Geoff Shaw, Stan & Marion Shimeld, Patrick Stirling-Aird, Bob Smith, Bob Swann, Kate Thompson and Sarah Wanless. We apologise to anybody who has been missed out; a few were sent in 'anonymously and we weren't always able to recognise the handwriting!

Sylvia Laing & Stan da Prato

Mike Ashley

First summer male Eye-browed Thrush
Auchmithie, Tayside.
28/30 May 1995

Summer feeding

Shelley Hinsley has sent us an interesting note on this point having dissected 3 large nestling tits which were each found to have a single piece of peanut stuck in their guts. Natural food in the form of caterpillars were present above the pieces of nut, suggesting that the parent had not found it difficult to obtain natural prey. It would be interesting to know of other examples of this. This information suggests that even broken nuts, or nuts in wire feeders which the birds have to break up, can be dangerous. If you want to be as safe as possible you can either temporarily stop feeding nuts or ground them up. Please continue feeding but beware of peanuts if there is any likelihood of them being fed to nestlings.

Too much feeding!

There can be situations where feeding birds caused problems for other citizens and local authorities. Town pigeons can cause problems due to the volume of their droppings. Local authorities often have to tread a careful path between offending the public, who enjoy feeding the birds, and owners and tenants who have to live with the resultant mess. However, only rarely do individuals take matters to the stage where an appearance in the High Court becomes necessary.

This recently happened in South Croydon, where the council took a lady to court as she refused to stop her habit of distributing bin liners of bread around the area. The council claimed it had spent £2,000 on cleaning up while the lady had received fines and cost orders for a similar amount. The court decided on a 28 day prison sentence for repeated contempt rather than the original offence of litter!

Hedge checks

Hedges will be the subject of a nationwide survey run by the YOC, junior section of the RSPB. One of the biggest threats today to hedgerows is loss through neglect. The previous YOC survey carried out in 1990 suggested that 35% of hedges were poorly cared for. Young people can check the health of these hedgerows with the help of a free information pack, sponsored by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Fishers. Copies are available from **YOC, Department N3309, 17 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh, EH7 5BN.**

Song Thrush *J Huxley RSPB*

Songbirds with little to sing about

The adverse effects of modern agriculture on wild life have been known for some time. The British Trust for Ornithology monitoring programmes provide evidence of the decline in populations of several songbirds.

The Song Thrush, once one of the UK's commonest garden visitors, has declined by 54% in the last 25 years. Other birds whose numbers have fallen include Linnet, Bullfinch and Tree Sparrow.

The use of pesticides, fewer weedrich fields in winter and the loss of nesting sites are implicated in the declines in numbers of many countryside birds, but how they each affect individual species is still not fully understood. Further research is needed to explain the drop in Song Thrush numbers and the RSPB is launching an appeal to fund this work.

The Society has begun a preliminary study of Song Thrushes at a site in West Sussex, where the population appears to have remained stable.

As many SOC members will have noticed 'set aside' despite its limitations - and other areas where agricultural activity has ceased or been reduced e.g. when land eventually due to be built on is left uncultivated - provides local examples of the potential for birds to recover their numbers. However a national policy is needed to ensure that food production for people is more sympathetic to other forms of life.

Declines in Songbirds between 1969 and 1994

Species	Estimated current population (pairs)	% decline in numbers
Song Thrush	990,000	54
Greenfinch	530,000	6
Starling	1,100,000	c. 50
Linnet	520,000	56
Bullfinch	190,000	67
Yellowhammer	1,200,000	5
Lapwing	210,000	50
Yellow Wagtail	50,000	11
Reed Bunting	220,000	59
Grey Partridge	150,000	73
Tree Sparrow	110,000	80
Turtle Dove	75,000	72
Corn Bunting	30,000	76
Stone Curlew	160	50
Corncrake	500	81

Source British Trust for Ornithology.

Today's Top Forty based on Biomass

	Species	'Pairs'	Mean Indiviual Wt. (g)	Total Biomass (Kg)	Position by Numbers
1	Pheasant	2,000,000	1,100	4,400,000	(12)
2	Wood Pigeon	3,300,000	500	3,300,000	(7)
3	Crow	1,250,000	550	1,375,000	(18)
4	Rook	1,370,000	480	1,315,200	(17)
5	Blackbird	6,250,000	100	1,250,000	(3)
6	Gannet	186,000	3,000	1,116,000	
7	Fulmar	571,000	780	990,760	(30)
8	Guillemot	600,000	700	840,000	(28)
9	Mute Swan	22,500	10,000	450,000	
10	Kittiwake	550,000	400	440,000	(31)
11	Magpie	900,000	220	396,000	(20)
12	Chaffinch	7,500,000	24	360,000	(2)
13	Herring Gull	200,000	900	360,000	
14	Puffin	450,000	380	342,000	(33)
15	Red Grouse	250,000	630	315,000	(40)
16	Jackdaw	600,000	230	276,000	(28)
17	House Sparrow	4,700,000	29	263,200	(5)
18	Mallard	120,000	1,080	259,200	
19	Razorbill	180,000	720	259,200	
20	Starling	1,450,000	80	255,200	(14)
21	Canada Goose	30,000	3,800	228,000	
22	Manx Shearwater	270,000	420	226,800	(38)
23	Robin	6,200,000	17	210,800	(4)
24	Song Thrush	1,380,000	73	201,480	(16)
25	Skylark	2,500,000	39	195,000	(11)
26	Moorhen	300,000	320	192,000	(36)
27	Wren	10,000,000	9.5	190,000	(1)
28	Shag	47,000	1,900	178,600	
29	Stock Dove	270,000	305	164,700	(38)
30	Lesser B-B. Gull	88,000	820	144,320	
31	Black headed Gull	200,000	280	112,000	(43)
32	Dunnock	2,800,000	19	106,400	(9)
33	Meadow Pipit	2,800,000	18.6	104,160	(9)
34	Blue Tit	4,400,000	11.2	98,560	(6)
35	Collared Dove	230,000	205	94,250	(41)
36	Lapwing	225,000	205	92,250	(42)
37	Yellowhammer	1,400,000	27.5	77,000	(15)
38	Great Tit	2,000,000	18	72,000	(12)
39	Cormorant	11,000	3,200	70,400	
40	Willow Warbler	3,100,000	9.0	55,800	(8)

Lapwing *S C Porter / RSPB*

Today's Top Forty

Ecology is not always best served by a focus on numbers of species or even numbers of individuals. Results of field work are often expressed in this way by ornithologists. It is common to show 'league tables' of species based on numbers, as in, for example, the BTO's Garden Birds Survey.

Mischievously, perhaps, I tabulated an alternative 'league table', of the top 40 British and Irish birds based on total biomass instead of numbers. Data was extracted from BWP and the latest Breeding Birds Atlas. Numbers were converted to breeding pairs directly from numbers of nests or from numbers of adults divided by two, if non-breeders were significant. Weights were approximately those of the average healthy adult prior to breeding, or the next best available figure. This way of looking at data is not new and I acknowledge that the idea might well have come from Southern's work on Tawny Owls and his use of 'prey units' several decades ago as well as more recent work all of it at a more rigorous level than my own! The table produces some interesting, and perhaps unexpected, points.

i) Big birds are more noticeable in the field, not only because they are bigger, but because collectively there is more to notice. Remember those flocks of corvids, gulls and pigeons that seemed to dominate the Winter Atlas fieldwork?

ii) Our most numerous summer migrant only just sneaked into the list at no. 40.

iii) Those species with large numbers of individuals, which fail to make the biomass list, come largely from amongst the finches, warblers and hirundines.

iv) Our island position is reflected in the presence of 9 sea birds but no raptors.

v) Despite the top two birds being vegetarian, the diets of many species on the list are carnivorous. This apparent ecological anomaly is because other animal groups must have a preponderance of their biomass amongst plant eating species - think of all those rabbits, voles and deer as well as the plant eating invertebrates.

Don't get too serious about the implications of this - just keep on with the field work!

Neville Crowther

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Strange calls of stone swallowing Rook

In October 1994, while sitting in my car at Longniddry Station, East Lothian, I gradually became aware of a repetitive sound, like two sticks being hit together. I looked round to see that the cause was a Rook perched low down in a dead Birch tree.

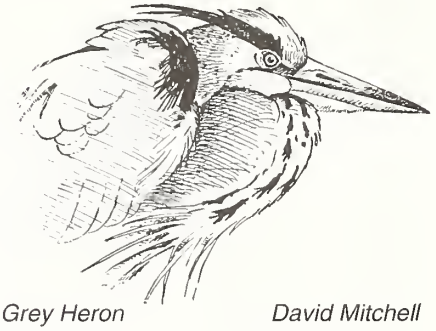
The Rook pushed its head forward and opened its bill. At the same time, I heard the 'stick-hitting' sound. By this time, I was sure there must be something wrong with the Rook's voice mechanism. However, the bird then uttered typical 'caws', identical to the calls from other Rooks in nearby trees.

After 7 minutes, the Rook had uttered at least 20 of the 'stick-hitting' calls. I noticed that the head and tail both moved into a nearly vertical line with the back during normal calls, but that the tail stayed down during the 'stick-hitting' calls.
The Rook flew down to the car park where the surface is liberally covered with grit. The Rook began picking up tiny stones in its bill and swallowing them. Occasionally it uttered the normal call, but none of the 'stick-hitting' variety. I counted 23 stones picked up before an express train made it fly off.

P W Gossip

Central Scotland Forest Strategy

A glossy publication with the above as its title has recently come into 21 Regent Terrace. Printed on "wood-free environmentally friendly paper" it opens with colour pictures of politicians and officials. However, it also contains interesting plans to double the existing woodland cover between Edinburgh and Glasgow in 20 years. To quote "the Forest will be different in style to any other in Scotland, designed for the 21st century, built on sustainable principles ... trees and woods will form a mosaic with other habitats and human settlements". It certainly uses all the current buzz words! Our copy is now in the Library. Anyone wanting more information on what is undoubtedly a large and interesting project should contact the Central Scotland Countryside Trust at Hillhouseridge, Shottskirk Road, Shotts, Lanarkshire ML7 4JS.



Grey Heron *David Mitchell*

Goldeneye

In the 1950's I put up nest boxes for Goldeneye at Lochs Tulla, Auchtertyre, Moraig, Kinord and Insh as birds had been seen till the end of April. Boxes were monitored for a few years, without success, though some boxes were used by Tawny Owls and Jackdaws. Nothing much happened till the 1970's when Roy Dennis started his big scale RSPB scheme throughout Strathspey which has been most successful. I was pleased to note an extension of breeding range, in seeing a duck with 6 recently hatched young on the south shore of Loch Tay on 23 May 1995. Up to 25 pairs of Goldeneye were present on this Loch throughout the winter and until the end of April. Three duck Goldeneye were noted on 13 May which might be considered local potential breeders. Both North and South Loch Tay shores were carefully covered to see if any other pairs had bred, but with negative results. The brood wasn't seen again; hopefully it dispersed safely, despite a lot of fishing boat activity.

Pat W Sandeman

Resignation rocks SNH

Concern over Scottish Natural Heritage intensified earlier this year when Professor George Dunnet's resignation from the SNH Board and as Chairman of its Scientific Advisory Committee became generally known. As most most readers of this magazine will know George has a long and distinguished record of service on important environmental committees and agencies, including the chairmanship of the Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group. His contribution to Scottish ornithology over the years was recognised by the SOC when he was made an Honorary Member in 1986. George has maintained a diplomatic silence over his resignation but informed speculation in environmental circles is that he felt SNH was failing to take and respect scientific advice on important issues, notably the marine environment.

Swallows mobbing Grey Heron

Herons are often mobbed in flight by a variety of species. A striking example of this occurred in August 1994, at Markle Loch, East Lothian. At 8pm on a clear, calm evening, a flock of 25-30 Swallows was seen mobbing a Grey Heron. It made several attempts to retaliate, all of them ineffectual. On 5 occasions, as it neared the Loch, it arched its neck back, and then stabbed forwards and downwards at the Swallows. It twice seemed to attempt to chase the Swallows but this only resulted in a slow, twisting flight and rapid loss of height.

Twice, it uttered loud, rasping calls typical of a Grey Heron in this situation. As it flew over the Loch, it lost height and landed on a low, stone wall whereupon the Swallows immediately left.

P W Gossip

Birdwatching in Hungary

Lothian members, Duncan & Esther Middleton, have recently returned from a birdwatching holiday in Hungary where they made contact with Gerard Gorman, author of "Where to Watch Bird in Easter Europe". They suggest anybody wishing to visit Hungary may like to contact Gerard to find the best places to visit or even arrange to have him as a guide in the field. Gerard can be contacted at:- PF 701-1047, Budapest 1399, Hungary. Phone or Fax (36) (1) 185-9128.

PHOTO SPOT

In an issue which features the Cairngorms and their links with Northern Europe it is appropriate to show a wader that is a very rare breeding bird in Scotland but relatively common in Scandinavia where John Chapman photographed this Wood Sandpiper on its nest.

'Life on the Edge' at Hermaness

SNH has opened a visitor centre at Hermaness, Shetland, the most northerly point of the British Isles. In the former lighthouse shore station, until recently home to the families who worked the nearby Muckle Flugga lighthouse, a small centre has been created for people to encounter nature on the edge. The centre is based on the reserve with its internationally important seabird populations and offers the opportunity to see and hear the commotion that together with the wind and sea make up the Hermaness experience. The centre is designed to offer a perspective that most visitors never experience - from the bottom of the cliffs, from above and underneath the sea. Young people should enjoy the chance to experience the inside of a Puffin's burrow.

As well as 25,000 pairs of Puffins and 10,000 pairs of Gannets visitors can expect 'bombing' Bonxies and 'Albert Ross', the single Black-browed Albatross who can be seen sitting with the Gannets on Saito outcrop between April and June. Other breeding birds include Fulmar, Kittiwake, Guillemot, Razorbill, Shag and Tystie on the cliffs with Arctic Skuas, Red-throated Divers and several waders on the moor. There are also interesting plants such a Spring Squill, Purple Field Gentians and several orchids.

Montrose Basin Wildlife Centre Opened

In June the Scottish Wildlife Trust opened its new wildlife centre overlooking the internationally important reserve at Montrose Basin in Angus. The opening ceremony was carried out by a director of Glaxo Wellcome, the largest employer in Montrose and the major private sector contributor to the project. Montrose Basin, together with the immediately surrounding land in conservation management, covers an area of 1,107 hectares. It is an extensive area of tidal mudflats, which provide a rich feeding ground for birds. The Basin is of international importance for Pink Footed and Greylag Geese and Redshank, and of national importance for Eider, Wigeon, Mute Swan, Oystercatcher and Knot. It has been estimated that 20% of the Icelandic population of Pink Footed Geese can be present in autumn. Montrose Basin is an SSSI, an international RAMSAR Site, and has recently been designated the 100th Special Protection Area in the UK, under the European Birds Directive.

The building comprises a viewing area, an audio - visual room, shop, rangers' office, a special area for schools and a mezzanine floor, now named The John Crichton Gallery, which will eventually feature a National Estuaries Centre. Ponds have been created within close viewing range of the main building and a hide will also be constructed.

Protecting our mammals

The legal situation with wild birds is not perfect, especially over enforcement, but laws have existed for some time that make it a criminal offence to harm most wild birds. Mammals have not had such protection except for a few very specific situations or species. Curbs on cruelty to wild animals are set to be introduced after a bill drafted by a Scottish MP cleared the Commons in July. The Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill would for the first time in British legal history make it an offence to "cruelly kick, beat, impale, burn, crush or drown any wild mammal". After gaining an unopposed third Commons reading, it went on to the House of Lords with a strong change of becoming law. However, the bill only succeeded in the Commons after its promoter, John McFall, MP for Dumbarton, compromised with hunt supporters and dropped a proposed ban.

The RSPCA has said: "It is a ground-breaking piece of law because for the first time ever all wild mammals will be protected from wanton violence and cruelty". The bill still allows the use of snares or traps and no longer includes a ban on the use of dogs to pursue mammals. But it introduces a jail term of up to six months for those convicted of cruelty; Mr McFall says current law does not tackle practices such as nailing squirrels to trees or throwing Hedgehogs on bonfires.

Great Expectations in the Cairngorms

Two recent events have raised expectations that, at long last ,some real progress might be made with tackling the intractable problems which threaten the international conservation importance of the Cairngorms. These are the establishment by the Secretary of State for Scotland of a new Partnership Board for the Cairngorms and the purchase of the 77,000 acre Mar Lodge estate by the National Trust for Scotland. Many people will be watching closely to see how effective these two very different organisations will be in achieving better environmental protection and management.

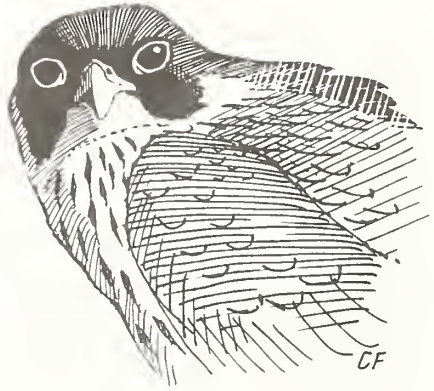
The new Cairngorm Partnership Board is similar to that recommended by the Cairngorm Working Party in 1993. It comprises 16 members, 5 from Local Authorities and 11 representing other interests. It is chaired by David Laird, Chairman of Scottish Natural Heritage North-East Board, though he is expected to give up the latter position. The Board is charged with preparing and implementing a Management strategy for the Cairngorms and will report annually to the Secretary of State and to the "Partner Bodies", who are the many statutory organisations which operate in the Cairngorms. Its priorities are:

1. Protection and enhancement of the conservation value of the mountain zone and the need for sympathetic management of recreational pressures.
2. Protection, regeneration and re-establishment of the native woodlands and the creation of new forests of Mar and Strathspey including appropriate management of deer and other grazing pressures.

No legal power

The Board has no legal power and will have to rely on persuasion to achieve its aims. It has a small executive staff with running costs met by SNH. Otherwise the Partnership will have no additional funds to support better management. The Government has stated that necessary powers and resources are already available from existing public agencies and, presumably, believes that the new Partnership will somehow inspire and coordinate these agencies to produce results which have not been forthcoming in the past. Some members of the Board have good conservation credentials, which is encouraging, but past experience suggests that they face a difficult and possibly frustrating task.

One problem will be to influence the development planning process to ensure a consistent and sympathetic approach is taken by the different planning authorities who between them cover the Cairngorms. In the past, developments have been allowed which took little account of conservation. How will the Partnership Board, without any formal powers, to improve the situation? Already it faces the very difficult issue of the proposed Funicular Railway on Cairngorm, which is supported by Highland Regional Council - and opposed by Grampian Region!. This development intends to transport much larger numbers of people to near the top of Cairngorm and inevitably increase pressures on the fragile montane vegetation. This vital issue should not be decided until the new Partnership has had time to prepare its Strategy for the whole area. However, the Partnership has no powers to insist that this happens, and it seems unlikely that time will be allowed for a more measured approach. It would be an inauspicious start for the Partnership if this development was allowed to go ahead prematurely.



Peregrine *Crispin Fisher*

Key land use

Of even greater importance for the natural environment is what happens with the key land uses in the Cairngorms: deer stalking, grouse shooting, forestry and agriculture. These provide essential ingredients for the proper management of the area yet they have all had adverse impacts on important wildlife habitats and species. The many factors which influence what happens with these land uses are complex and inter-related. None will be under the control of the Partnership and, without access to new funds to encourage positive management or last resort powers to prevent damaging activities, it is hard to see land owners and occupiers making significant changes to current practices.

Sporting estates have allowed deer numbers to become far too high and, consequently, heavy deer grazing is damaging upland vegetation and soils, as well as preventing regeneration of the native woodlands. Substantial reductions in deer numbers are necessary on most estates while, on some, populations need to be reduced to very low levels to allow woodland to regenerate. While estates do now recognise there is a problem, and some have increased culls, there is still enormous reluctance to contemplate the kind of reductions that are required. For conservationists in Scotland, the Red Deer issue has become a symbol of all that is wrong with Highland land use. To a considerable extent the Partnership will be judged by its success in bringing deer numbers back into balance with their environment.

Differing opinions

With its local representation the Partnership Board should be able to make a valuable contribution in influencing local opinion which has been sadly divided on the merits of securing better conservation in the Cairngorms. Too many local people, including some Councillors, still see conservation as conflicting with economic development instead of recognising that the area's natural qualities are its greatest asset.

Although many people would have preferred to see a stronger arrangement on National Park lines, there is a real desire to see the Partnership succeed and to help it to do so. I would put in a special plea that the Board ensures that proper scientific monitoring of habitats and species is put in place so that in the future there can be no doubt whether progress is being made. The lack of such information was a serious handicap to the deliberations of the Cairngorm Working Party.

Mar Lodge

The NTS is to be congratulated on its purchase of Mar Lodge Estate. It thought long and hard about taking this on and there was considerable divergence of views within the Trust as to whether they

should do so. NTS recognised that this would be a massive long term undertaking, quite different to anything that they have owned previously. Also, there was understandable concern that the very large running costs of the estate could become a serious financial drain on the Trust. However, they were able to negotiate a generous endowment from the National Heritage Memorial Fund (£10.3 million of Lottery money) as well as an annual payment from SNH reported by the press to be £170,000. It was the lack of any commitment from either of these organisations towards management costs which scuppered the earlier attempt to buy the the estate by the Consortium of WWF, John Muir Trust and RSPB. Interestingly, the behind the scenes opposition from landowning interests which was instrumental in blocking the Consortium's initiative did not materialise in the case of the National Trust.

Fundamental change

Buying the estate is but the first, essential step towards its proper management for the wider public interest. Mar Lodge is the largest and most important of the 5 estates which comprise the central core of the Cairngorms, including huge areas of high mountain country and large remnants of native pinewood, now on their last legs because of 200 years of heavy deer grazing. A fundamental change in the way the estate is managed is now needed, as spelt out by the Consortium in their document "Mar Lodge Estate - A New Future". NTS have consulted widely and are well aware of what is expected of them. They are sensitive to past criticism for the way they have managed some of their upland properties. Most public criticisms were directed at visitor facilities considered to have damaged the wild land qualities of some properties. Other, perhaps more serious concerns, have been that NTS land has not been managed to realise its full conservation value, for example, due to overgrazing by sheep and deer.

There are now clear signs the NTS are responding to these comments. Mar Lodge provides a wonderful opportunity to give the world a demonstration of the best possible practice in estate management. It will require vision and sustained long term effort to realise the full potential of this magnificent area, but there are many organisation and individuals who will enthusiastically help the Trust if given the chance. RSPB have shown on the adjoining Abernethy Forest Estate that it is possible to get woodland regeneration without deer fences and there is now a lot of experience of sensitive visitor management in the uplands. NTS will encounter pressure from landowning and sporting interests who believe that a famous sporting estate like Mar should continue to be run on traditional lines and regard conservation management as unnecessary and an implied criticism of the way other estates are run. It is unfortunate that a condition of an anonymous donation, which has, provided the purchase price of the estate, is that it should be maintained as a sporting estate. NTS believe the condition can be accommodated without compromising conservation interests. In practice it may be difficult to avoid the sporting requirements having undue influence. The decision to continue to use Land Agents, Smiths Gore, to manage the estate is likely to make it more difficult to convince the existing staff that things have really changed. They will need encouragement and training so that they can take on additional areas of work. Other conservation organisations have shown that is is possible for estate staff to adapt to different objectives and learn new skills. It is important that this happens at Mar Lodge.

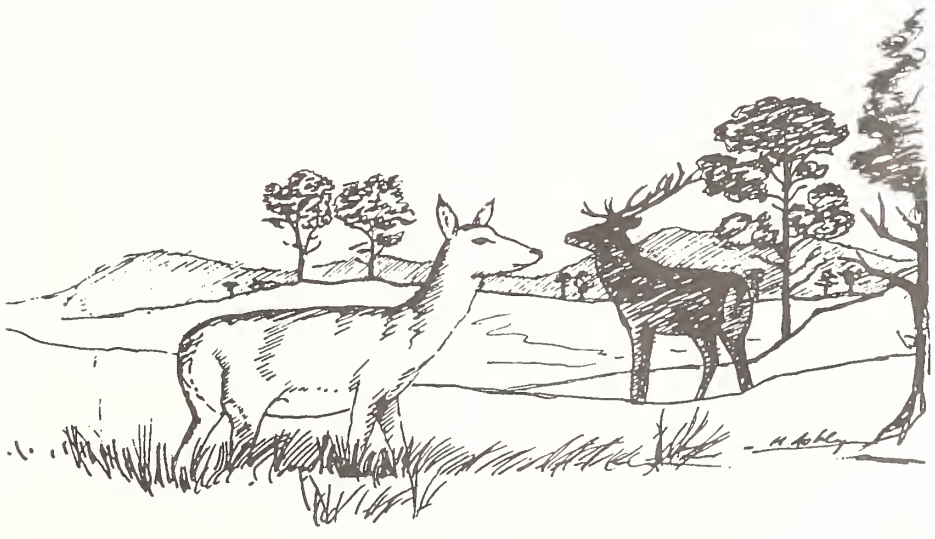
Deer management

Deer management will be the crucial issue on Mar. NTS have stated that they intend to halve deer numbers on the estate and have ruled out fencing. Their efforts deserve support. Adjoining estates to the south, such as Atholl, will be nervous that deer reductions on Mar may affect their own deer stocks and, on past experience, will use their influence to persuade NTS to go gently. This is the kind of pressure that both NTS and SNH (who, as paymasters, will have a major voice in what happens) must resist. It is to be hoped that the new conservation owners of Glen Feshie, Wills Woodlands, which lies to the west of Mar Lodge, will also adopt the same approach to deer management. If so, this will help NTS since some of the deer on Mar also spend time on Feshie. If deer populations can be managed properly on Mar Lodge, Feshie and Abernethy estates, this raises the dazzling prospect in the long term of restoring a truly natural forest on a scale not found anywhere else in western Europe.

Interesting times lie ahead. NTS can make a major contribution to the work of the new Partnership Board in the wider Cairngorm area, by demonstrating real achievements on the ground at Mar and also through use of their undoubted influence with other landowners. The Board need time and support to show what they can achieve. However, expectations have been aroused and progress is expected. If that is not forthcoming, then there will be a growing clamour for a stronger mechanism to safeguard this very special part of Scotland's heritage.

John Hunt

For many years John worked with RSPB in Scotland as Reserves Manager; he was a member of the Cairngorm Working Party.



Red Deer and Scots Pines *Mike Ashley*

Walking through the Cairngorms

The Cairngorms are probably the most important mountain range in Britain. Recent and ongoing changes in ownership of several estates, discussion about management, development and the case for the area becoming a National Park mean that the Cairngorms will feature in any discussion of conservation in Scotland in the foreseeable future. Many SOC members know the Cairngorms and several are acknowledged experts on the area. However, not everyone in the club is able to venture into what can be hazardous country. To give a flavour of the area, its wildlife and the world of the hill walker, SBN's more substantial editor provides a very personal account of an Easter walk from Speyside to Deeside and back through the two famous hill passes that penetrate the central Cairngorm mountains.

Spring snow

Spring in these mountains is still a time when much of the ground is snow covered; indeed some of the heavier snow falls in the area often come towards the end of the winter and this was very much the case in 1994. However as PRG (as a member of staff of a well known conservation body my companion prefers some degree of anonymity) and your scribe set off from Loch Morlich carrying packs with essentials for the walk and overnight stay in a bothy, the sun beat down and heat exhaustion seemed the most likely problem.

Pressures and problems

Loch Morlich and its surrounding forest show much of what is special, but also some of the problems, of the area. Some of the woodland is still Caledonian pine but there has been a great deal of planting of exotic conifers. Grazing pressure limits the natural regeneration of the forest and there are unnaturally sharp edges along deer fences.The loch itself is heavily used for water sports and birds like divers no longer breed. The spectacular backdrop of Cairngorm and its northern corries already carries the burden of downhill ski development, an all year cable car and restaurant with proposals for more. However, the rush to blame human disturbance is too often, and too readily, followed by many in the conservation field; human actions do not affect wildlife in simple proportion to the number of people involved but according to what they actually do. A few decision makers with the power to plant /fence/develop or not have far more effect on the land in the long term than thousands of walkers. It is also worth bearing in mind that some of the staunchest defenders of the Cairngorms have been walkers and climbers especially those who realise that in the past Scotland's hill country supported more people, as well as wildlife, than it does today.

Pines and perspiration

Enough of outdoor philosophy. Walking through centuries old pine woods on a sunny day is one of Scotland's great outdoor pleasures even if some of the most spectacular animals are no longer present and not all the wildlife that is left chooses to reveal itself. We did not see any of the Red Squirrels for which these woods are a stronghold. Crossbills were only seen distantly, and in flight , which is why they remain Crossbill sp uncertain! However, Goldeneye were a timely reminder that not all recent change has been for the worse and trilling calls from the club's Crested emblem encouraged two profusely perspiring walkers as they worked upwards towards the start of the Lairig Ghru. Near the edge of the trees the distinctive sound of a falcon indicated young nearby; in a wildlife film the falcon would doubtless be a suitably impressive Peregrine but honesty must admit it was the ubiquitous Kestrel.

Ptarmigan *Mike Ashley*

The pause necessary to confirm this allowed a family group to overtake. Generating considerably more noise than the Kestrel, mother and daughters were soon posing among the heather while dad played happily with his camera equipment. We pushed on quickly, reasoning that the snow line would inhibit further photo opportunities.

The Lairig Ghru is the most rugged of the routes through the Cairngorms, rising to around 2,700 feet near the Pools of Dee. On this visit the snow was continuous from about 2,000 feet. Though the most common translation from Gaelic is that of dark or gloomy place, sunglasses were soon essential as the snow sparkled in the sunlight. The pace slowed appreciably through soft, knee deep snow. Loud cracking noises announced falls of ice from nearby cliffs which were hard to locate until we realised how even a small fall could generate a remarkable din through the calm air. A deeper rumble, at first thought to be an aircraft, was probably a bigger movement of snow somewhere around Braeriach.

A nearer and visible movement turned out to be a collie dog whose owner was stretched out on a small area of stones from which the sun had melted the snow. His fitness level was clearly well below the collie's and not helped by the cigarette on which he drew heavily as he asked how much further until it became downhill. With the consideration that is the mark of the true hill goer we replied that the worst was yet to come. Another cigarette was immediately lit and a volley directed at the collie which was bored

and anxious to be on the move. Readers whose experience of working dogs is limited to sanitised TV programmes such as *One Man and his Dog* may not realise how many of Scotland's collies and retrievers answer - or choose not to answer- to names such as "ya blanking wee so and so". From a dog's point of view the words are probably indistinguishable from Champion Curly Wurly Pretty Paws though the intonation tends to be strikingly different.

Arctic affinities

We moved on. The Arctic affinities of the area were very apparent in the huge corries that dominate the east sides of Braeriach and Cairn Toul. In total contrast a Small Tortoiseshell Butterfly, wings rufous in the strong light, headed towards the top of the pass; we hoped it made it over to Speyside. A familiar croaking drew attention to a truly Arctic bird, or rather pair, as Ptarmigan displayed on the snow. Their display was interrupted by the "Wee So and So" who had decided that anything that moved was more interesting company than his master, by now plodding resignedly through the snow some way behind. The need to be first to the bothy became paramount. Soon it was in view and downhill! However joy was short lived as the going became softer through knee deep muddy porridge. At last we reached the footbridge that takes walkers over the young River Dee to Corrour Bothy.

The bothy

Corrour Bothy lies near the foot of a forbidding crag known as the Devil's Point. Though there have been concerns about litter at this and other bothies - indeed some have even had to be demolished due to abuse - our thoughts were of shade and rest after miles with packs. Quickly establishing sleeping bags in the cleanest corner we set about feeding and watering arrangements. Water was certainly freely available in the form of melt water at the door. With typical generosity I had offered to carry in a flask of malt from the Scotch Whisky Society leaving PRG to bring a bottle of red wine. In fact, the real reason for my generosity with the whisky was that, being cask strength, it has to be diluted with water and therefore there was less weight to carry. It went down exceedingly well with melted snow. PRG meanwhile got his trusty paraffin stove going and we began heating up our pasta. At this point the Wee So and So appeared round the door, soon to followed by his owner, who grunted a greeting before collapsing into his sleeping bag. He only emerged when PRG offered tea which he quickly consumed and then fell asleep again. Wee So and So looked even more bored and accompanied anyone who went outside in the hope of at a stone to chase. This he usually got as it allowed the person to pursue their reason for being outside without the close attentions of the dog.

Rock or raptor?

Food over we scanned around as birders tend to do. Could a dark lump high on Carn a' Mhaim be a rock or a raptor? Obviously it appeared to move but so do all rocks if you try to hold your binoculars on them for long enough. Eventually it stretched its neck and confirmed itself as the first Golden Eagle of the walk. Oblivious to cold and glare, it sat on the rock for a further 20 minutes before spreading great wings and flying slowly off south west.

Reluctant to go indoors, I stayed out as the light began to fade. A group of Red Deer hinds had moved towards the bothy to feed. One came closer. The evening light probably exaggerated the effect but it looked almost white. It looked directly at bothy and human for some time before moving off with the other deer.

Golden Eagles *Mike Ashley*

Expensive clothing

Another movement, but this time on top of the Devil's Point, was obviously a person. This did not lead to great enthusiasm as the hut would be cramped if it turned out to be a group. Worse still, a direct descent to the bothy ran the risk of accident and we would have to make some sort of rescue attempt. Fortunately the lone climber descended safely and was soon in the bothy, where he began to shed many layers of expensive looking clothing of the type, if not the size, regularly modelled by Ms Muriel Gray of Munro Show fame. He turned out to be a pleasant young chap employed by a well known outdoor shop where he received generous discounts and even free kit to test. This led everyone else in the hut to recount all the criticisms they could think of concerning the quality and cost of his employer's products. There was an almost audible sigh of pleasure when we realised that he had been wearing and carrying so much gear that a nasty sweat rash had developed in his nether regions, casting doubt on his ability to walk far the next day. The companionship of the hills is indeed a fine thing.

Changing weather

A perfect day's weather in the Scottish hills is often followed by rain and dawn did not disappoint us. The cloud was down on all the tops and a steady drizzle was starting. The only signs of life were the piping of a Ring Ouzel from the crags and a Pied Wagtail flitting round the bothy. We ate quickly and moved off, uncomfortably aware that over half the distance still lay ahead. Wee So and So trotted with us briefly before turning back to the hut. The drizzle increased as we moved east into Glen Luibeg. Familiar calls from the mist presaged skeins of grey geese trying to follow the passes through the hills; some soon flew back.

By the Luibeg the rain had eased. Over 100 stags moved off at our approach; they seem to be fed in the area and make a impressive sight though the concentration of such numbers does not bode well for the vegetation. We swung north through more fine pines towards Glen Derry and the other pass, the Lairig an Laoigh, the pass of the young cattle. Open ground brought more Meadow Pipits - surely the most common bird in the Scottish uplands, at least in summer- and our only Curlews. Higher again, and more snow, with views into the corries and shoulders of Derry Cairngorm and Corrie Etchachan on the side of Ben Macdui. The small hut at the Fords of Avon was open and half filled with snow; another problem for our young salesman who had hoped to walk over Macdui. Spreading out in case snow bridges over the burns gave way, we tentatively moved north, noting avalanche debris on the side of A' Choinneach. By now tiredness was the dominant feeling but a temporary lift came as Golden Eagles soared overhead. Tiredness reasserted itself as it became obvious that we had some distance to go over rough heather as well as an uphill stretch.

Final miles

At this point we were on undulating heather moor, part of one of the larger reserves now owned by that internationally famous organisation for which PRG works. Birdlife seemed to consist of Meadow Pipits and enough Red Grouse to gladden a keeper's heart; raptors and other interesting species stayed infuriatingly out of view. An increase in height is the last thing one wants towards the end of a long day but was unavoidable as the path swung northwest towards Ryvoan and the short pass through to Glen More.

The final few miles saw your editor trailing in PRG's wake; as the driver there was rather more pressure on him to commence the homeward journey while weight may also have had some slight influence. By the time I reached the car my companion had already removed his breeches, thereby revealing an extraordinary pair of boxer shorts on which a picture of Santa Claus was printed. Let us hope that an impressionable child's cry of "Look at that, Mummy!" was inspired by the scenery as a family rounded a bend in the track to encounter a view of Santa rather different to that promoted by the Spey Valley Tourist Board.

Summing up

Apart from the exercise what is the point of such a walk? Despite good views of eagles and some other species it is quite unnecessary to walk nearly 50 kilometres and stay out overnight to see them. If we had tried to go over the tops we would probably have seen even fewer species and certainly expended more energy. The answer is complex. Long distance walking gives an idea of the scale and overall ecology of these hills that a quick sortie from the chair lift to tick off Ptarmigan etc never does. It emphasises that wildlife is often sparse and can be hard to see. Personally, I cannot walk in these, or other Scottish hills, without thinking of the contrast with other parts of Europe where the habitat has been treated more kindly by those responsible for it.

In summary the Cairngorms are a part of Scotland that cries out for better management and protection. They are not a wildlife paradise - though they could become one - but they are certainly not the "wasteland ripe for development" as one tourist official once put it. Highly valued by some, misunderstood by many, they offer those who walk among them the quiet to reflect on what once was and what might be possible again.

Stan da Prato

Golden Eagle head *Mike Ashley*

1995 Annual Conference

This will be held over the weekend 3rd/5th November at the Duke of Gordon Hotel, Kingussie. Speyside is particularly attractive in autumn as the birches turn colour. Though some special birds, such as Ospreys, will have gone south many of the area's specialities are resident and some, such as Capercaillie, can be easier to see than in summer. There are also winter visitors such as Whooper Swans and increased numbers of Hen Harriers.

The famous Russian naturalist, writer and broadcaster, Algirdas Knystautas, will start the conference on Saturday morning with a well illustrated look at the "Birds of Russia". Some members may have had the opportunity to hear Algirdas during a tour of Scotland last winter and, from comments received, many will be coming along to hear him again.

Following Algirdas we keep to the theme of Arctic birds with a look at "How Lemmings rule the Arctic" with SOC member Ron Summers who has been looking at the effects of Lemmings on the breeding birds of the Taimyr Peninsula. Kathleen Cartwright, co-founder of Arcturus Expeditions, has made 7 visits to Arctic Russia, including 3 to one of the most ornithologically abundant areas - the Kolyma Delta. Kathleen will take us on a slide trip to the Kolyma Delta. To round off Saturday morning Norman Elkins will discuss "The Weather Factor" and why so many Russian birds winter or visit us. Norman is currently a meteorologist at the RAF base in Fife, and is author of 'Weather and Bird Behaviour'.

Sunday morning's programme is equally exciting starting with well known personality Roy Dennis. Roy has been one of the leading figures in the reintroduction of both Sea Eagles and Red Kites in Scotland. Now a freelance environmental consultant Roy is turning his attentions to the possible reintroduction of mammals such as Bears and Beavers and we look forward with interest to what he has to say about this. Richard Evans will then tell us about the wintering seaduck, divers and grebes in the Moray Firth. After coffee we hear from Rik Smith, who will be telling us about 7 years work on the high tops of the Cairngorms, with particular emphasis on Snow Buntings, their breeding biology and winter behaviour. Mark O'Brien then follows with details of the recent wader survey which was organised jointly by the SOC and RSPB in Scotland. Many members will no doubt have taken part in this survey, and will be interested to hear the results.

Finally, to round things off, well known natural history photographer Pete Moore will give us a photographer's view of Scotland, its Wildlife and Wildlands. Among other commissions Pete recently supplied the pictures for Roy Dennis's book which accompanied the television series "The Loch". In addition there will be the usual popular Friday evening slide show, organised this year by Angus Hogg. There will also be a variety of optional field trips and a film on Saturday afternoon. It all promises to be an excellent weekend so fill in the booking form that accompanies this mailing of SBN.

SNH policy on reintroductions

One of the topics at this autumn's SOC conference is the possibility of reintroducing mammals to Scotland.
The return of the Beaver, hunted to extinction in Britain five centuries ago for its pelt and scent glands, came a little closer when Scottish Natural Heritage announced plans to protect and encourage 17 of the country's rare plants and animals. The species action programme includes feasibility studies of habitat suitability followed by public consultation, particularly with forestry, farming, land owning and crofting groups. Reintroduced Beavers are unlikely before the year 2000. Bears and Wolves are less likely to be reintroduced to Scotland's wild areas. The chief scientific adviser of SNH, Professor Michael Usher, has said these proposals would fall on the grounds of environmental suitability. Professor Usher said the Beaver had been successfully reintroduced into Sweden and the Netherlands, where it had not undermined banks of blocked rivers through damming, unlike its North American counterpart. He also said there should be none of the problems posed by other introduced aquatic mammals such as Muskrat, Coypu and Mink.
There also will be efforts to stop the decline of the Red Squirrel and control its rival, the North American Grey. It is also hoped to maintain or increase the globally threatened Corncrake, the Sea Eagle and Red Kite.

Red deer reduction

In July the Red Deer Commission announced its culling figures for 1994/95. The figure of 57,567 for stags and hinds was the second highest ever and was an increase of 1,000 on the previous year. The Commission's technical director said the Red Deer population was still in danger of becoming too large for the availiable land. This would lead to high natural mortality rates and put a huge strain on their habitat. The commission thinks the stock of 166,000 hinds needs to be cut down to 110,000 ie by one third.

The Scottish Office gave the commission new powers in May so that estates can be forced to cull deer if they are causing long term damage to the habitat. There are over half a million deer in Scotland, including 300,000 Red Deer. Roe Deer may be more numerous and some estimate the total for all species of deer in Scotland is nearer 750,000.

White-tailed Eagle *John Love*

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay - Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist - almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodland garden of Colonsay House.

Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (21/2 hour passage). Demi-pension from £60.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £140.00 weekly.

On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke - £16.00 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

THE HOTEL, ISLE OF COLONSAY, ARGYLL
(Kevin and Christa Byrne)
Telephone: Colonsay (019512) 316 - open all year

N.B. Booklet @ £3.50 inc. p&p describes the island's birds - 66pp plus 8pp colour photos.

REVIEWS

The Birds of Badenoch and Strathspey *by Roy Dennis 1995 Colin Baxter Photography Ltd. Grantown on Spey PH26 3NA £8.95. ISBN 0 948661 62 3*

With its unique habitats and equally unique birdlife, Speyside has become a magnet for most Scottish and many visiting birders. The fact that Roy Dennis's new book, which accurately details the occurrence and status of the birds of this district, has just arrived in our bookshops can only further enhance this attraction. With a total of 237 species listed as having been recorded, the Species Accounts comprise the bulk of the text and make a fascinating read - no surprise that Osprey should figure so prominently, perhaps!

However, I found other sections in the book just as readable, as well as being very useful to the first-time visitor e.g. The Ornithological Year, and Reserves and Places to Visit, with the Species Checklist at the end giving one a clear idea of what can be expected and when. The fact that Roy has lost none of his enthusiasm for the area comes through strongly, and there are clear indications of his feelings for the area's birdlife in the gentle reminders to the reader on how to go about seeing some of the more vulnerable species.

With much of the information from this book on the area updated, and presented in a crisp, unfussy style, the text is supplemented by a series of attractive line drawing by a variety of artists. For anyone planning to visit the area, whether for the first or umpteenth time, I can think of no better way to get a clear idea of what this magnificent area has to offer than to get a copy of this book.

Angus Hogg

The Birds of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. *Ian J Andrews, 1995. Published by I J Andrews. £18.50 ISBN 0 9524978 0 8*

This is an excellent regional guide conveying both the distinctive flavour of Jordan and a great deal of precisely collated information. The 31 landscape photographs (colour) capture the varied habitats whilst the 129 colour photographs of birds are first class and of great value for identification - for example of raptors. There is a succinct introduction to the country of Jordan and its avifaunal regions, plus a gazetteer of Jordanian localities and an index of place names. Much thought has

gone into the layout and contents and everything is thoroughly accessible and well indexed. The type is crisp and attractive. This paean of praise must be interrupted by one substantial grouse. John Busby provides 86 superb drawings, full of atmosphere, in recognition of which he gets a small listing, tucked away with 8 others on the back cover, plus an acknowledgment in the introduction. His name should have shared the title page. On a personal note, I was sorely grieved to read of the drying up of the Azraq Oasis, where my wife and I spent nearly 2 years in 1968-69, attempting to establish a Desert Research Centre. The dire warnings I tried to give ("Azraq Desert Oasis" Allen Lane 1973) did no good at all. Anyway, congratulations to Lothian SOC member Ian Andrews.

Bryan Nelson

"One pair of Eyes" *Donald Watson. Limited edition. Arlequin Press. 1994 152pp. 1-60 Leatherbound with picture £325. 61-1000 clothbound £55. Available from Arlequin Press, 26 Broomfield Road, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 1SW.*

This is the latest limited edition book from Arlequin Press following on from previous volumes featuring marvellous drawings by John Busby and Eric Ennion's lyrical watercolours. Each book is a pleasure to browse through with super quality of paper and reproduction.

'One Pair of Eyes' contains 152 pages with a fine collection of essays beautifully illustrated with 84 colour paintings and numerous black and white drawings.

Donald's forte has always been landscapes with birds, many painted plein-air giving a lovely fresh impressionistic atmosphere. Primarily from Scotland this selection spans a period of 46 years and shows some of the finest work by this consummate artist/naturalist/author. Dumfries, Galloway and Hen Harriers feature prominently but subjects range widely from the Isle of May to St. Kilda, Mallards on the urban Water of Leith, Sanderling on a Tiree beach, Barnacle Geese on the Solway Merse to Ptarmigan and Dotterel on the high tops. Foreign forays include visits to France, Spain, the Seychelles and an Anna's Hummingbird in California.

From small thumbnail ketches to larger landscapes this book will appeal to anyone who delights in the portrayal of the natural world.

Keith Brockie

The Birdwatcher's Handbook. A Guide to the Natural History of the Birds of Britain and Europe *by Paul R Ehrlich, David S Dobkin, Darryl Wheye and Stuart L Pimm. Oxford University Press. 660pp. £12.95. ISBN 0 19 858407 5.*

This handbook is by four ornithologists based in the United States. It has half-page entries for 516 species giving brief details on breeding habitat, displays, nesting, diet, wintering and conservation, conveyed partly through pictograms showing, eg. nest site, diet and foraging techniques. Identification and voice are not covered. The species accounts occupy the left-hand pages, while the right-hand pages contain some 170 essays, mainly on aspects of behaviour. There is an extensive bibliography and excellent indexes. This volume is hardly essential, but it does complement field guides with much concise information and interesting essays on bird behaviour and biology.

Peter Vandome

Woodpeckers: a guide to Woodpeckers, Piculets and Wrynecks of the World. *Hans Winkler, David A Christie and David Nurney. Pica Press £30. ISBN 1-873403.25.9*

The book starts with a short general overview of the biology of the species which is followed by a section of coloured plates. These show not only the nominate form but in many cases other races and, where juvenile plumage is different this too is illustrated. The plates are captioned on the opposite page which also contains a brief summary of the distribution and a reference to the main text and map.

The body of the work is devoted to a full species account and good distribution maps. Each account comprises of a note on the identification, the distribution, including a map, and records of movements outside the main areas where the bird is found. Habitats, geographical variations within the species, voice, habits, food, breeding and essential bibliographical reference to the species are also covered in this section.

The follows a bibliography laid out two columns to the page. This format is slightly better and easier to follow than the one adopted in some of the Helm series of identification guides.

It would be difficult to review this book without mentioning the 'Helm Identification Guides' and drawing some comparisons between the two. The basic layout of the two series is much the same but the inclusion of the maps alongside the main text allows for greater detail. The increased page size also helps to avoid some of the cramming which is inevitable in the Helm series. I can thoroughly recommend this modern approach taken by the authors and hope to see further volumes in the near future.

Peter Marriott

Birds and Climate Change *by John F Burton, Christopher Helm / A & C Black. London 1995. 376pp 25 line drawings 3 diagrams. £24.99(hardback) ISBN 0-7136-4045-6*

A few years ago the media were discussing how Britain would be affected by cooling climate and the possibility of another Ice Age! More recently the fashion has been to predict all sorts of problems arising from global warming. Since this can be linked to human activity it seems to be even more popular.

This book deals with much more than these recent concerns. The first Section, on the Historical Background, looks at the Ice Age and subsequent periods, notably the 'Little Ice Age' from the 13th to 19th centuries and the amelioration in climate in the 100 years since 1850. This leads into Section 2 which looks at the effect of this amelioration on different groups of European birds. The third Section covers the topic 'New Ice Age or Greenhouse Warming' in 3 chapters : the apparent effect on birds of deterioration in the European climate from 1950-80, species expansion in response to the 'greenhouse effect' and, finally, a discussion of what the future may hold. There are also a number of appendices listing species for which there is some evidence of climate related changes in status as well as the late Kenneth Williamson's (to whom the book is dedicated) paper on 'Climate Effects on the Evolution of Migratory Birds'.

The book concentrates on British birds, partly due to the author's expertise but also because "the British Isles are a particularly sensitive area (to change) due to their location at the eastern edge of a large ocean".

A problem for most of us is that, though we can (just about) cope with monitoring bird populations and status changes, understanding climate change really is 'big science' for which you need big computers and complex maths and physics. The main pattern seems to be that we are still in an inter glacial interlude within an Ice Age but with the complication that the human induced, or at least

aggravated, 'greenhouse effect' is now competing with a phase of natural cooling!

This is a well written book that should be of interest to most ornithologists.

Stan da Prato

"Field Guides for Russia": news from Ekaterinburg

The scheme has now been running for over a year, and it is time to take stock. Altogether 40 bird books have come from Scotland, 27 of them being various field guides to the birds of Britain or Britain and Europe. The largest number was sent by Mike Ramage (Buckhaven, 10), and other donors were Bill, Hetty and Geoffrey Harper (Edinburgh, 9), Harry Dott (Edinburgh 8), Eric Meek (Orkney, 3), Ian Wilson (Stirling, 2), Janet Bell (Dumfries), who sent the very first one, and seven others sending one each. The arrival of every book was a cause for celebration. We are most grateful to everyone who has sent them, and also to the organisers of the scheme - Roger Brewer and Geoffrey Harper.

The members of our branch live in the Urals and West Siberia. The largest number (6) of the field guides has stayed in Ekaterinburg. More than half of the members of our branch live in Ekaterinburg - our "head-quarters". However, in choosing the members to send field guides to, we have tried to give priority to (a) those who live a long way away and so cannot often come to our meetings and discussions; and (b) those who work with children or students and do not have suitable bird books. Twelve field guides went to leaders of children's and naturalists' club, and teachers in schools and higher education. Professional ornithologists have received five - nearly all these are people living and working in nature reserves a long way from towns and libraries. Another seven have gone to amateurs and three to students.

The field guides have been issued as long-term personal loans (or, to be realistic, that means for good). The other books you have sent are held in the library of the Urals Branch of our society and anyone can use them, borrowing them for a time if they wish.

Vadim Ryabitsev

MEMBERS' REQUESTS

Colour marked Greylag Geese

Sightings of Greylags bearing dye marks, darvic rings or neck collars, together with details of colour and letters seen (no matter how incomplete), should be sent to: **Brian Etheridge, Morven, Station Road, Avoch, Ross-shire IV9 8RW. Telephone: 01381-620098 (home) or 01463-715000 (work)**

Colour ringed Ring Ouzels

A number of birds have been individually colour ringed. Any sightings of colour ringed Ring Ouzels will be greatly appreciated by **David Arthur, 12 Dundee Street, Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7PD. 01241 853356.**

Wing Tagged Sea Eagles

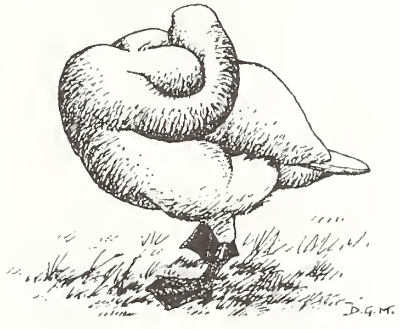
Anybody who sees a wing tagged Sea Eagle should contact either the **RSPB, North Scotland Office, at Etive House, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW. Tel 01463 715000 or Roger Broad, RSPB, West of Scotland Office, Science Park, Glasgow G20 0SP. Tel 0141 945 5224 as soon as possible.**

Wing tagged Hen Harriers

Details of any sightings however incomplete should be sent to **Brian Etheridge, RSPB North Scotland Office, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW tel 01463 715000** as soon as possible.

Colour ringed Stonechats

All sightings will be acknowledged by **Andrew Thorpe, 30 Monearn Gardens, Milltimber, Aberdeen AB1 1YP**



Roosting Swan *David Mitchell*

Colour ringed Mute Swans - Lothian & Fife

Sightings should be sent to **Allan & Lyndesay Brown, 61 Watt's Gardens, Cupar, Fife, KY15 4UG (Telephone 01334 656804)** from whom further information can be obtained on the study.

SOC NOTICES

200 Club

Winners for the first quarter of 1995 were:-
April 1st £30 - T H McGeorge, Edinburgh; 2nd £20 - D McIvor, Stornoway; 3rd £10 - Miss B J Cain, Beeswing, Dumfries.
May 1st £30 - Dr N E Armstrong, Lochmaben; 2nd £25 - I T Craig, Falkirk; 3rd £20 - Mrs P M Fairbairn, Melrose; 4th £10 - I J A Brown, Oman.
June 1st £30 - C McLellan, Motherwell; 2nd £20 - Dr M E Castle, Ayr; 3rd £10 - R M Sellars, Nailsworth, Glos..
The seventh year of the 200 Club started on 1 June. A very warm 'thank you' to all members who pay by cheque or cash and who renewed their subscription. If you are one of the very few who did not, you can still send me a cheque for £12 (payable to "SOC 200 Club"); your positive help to the SOC will be greatly appreciated. Also, if you are an SOC member, and over 18, you can still join by sending me a cheque for £9 to cover your membership for the year, and be eligible for all monthly draws to May 1996.
Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NO (tel. 01896 822 176).

Scottish Birds

Authors can reduce the typing burden on Sylvia and Pamela if they are able to submit final versions of papers on Apple Mac discs. Remember that to keep publication costs down we now do all the word processing in the office and give the printer a disc along with plates and artwork. If it is not on Apple Mac we have to retype it all!

Scottish Birds Records Committee Election of New Member

In 1990 S.B.R.C. commenced a rotation with one member now retiring annually. Angus Hogg is due to stand down at the end of this year and to fill the vacancy the Committee has nominated Bruce Forrester, who also lives in Ayrshire. He is an active birdwatcher who has travelled widely abroad, contributes regularly to publications and has seen well over four hundred species in Britain.
Further nominations to fill the vacancy are invited and should be submitted to me by 31st October, being signed by both a proposer and a seconder who must both be S.O.C. members. If there should be more than one nomination, a postal ballot will take place, in which all SO.C. Local Recorders will be eligible to vote.
Ron Forrester, Secretary, S.B.R.C., 31 Argyle Terrace, Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 0BD

Council Notes

A meeting of **Local Recorders** to be organised by the SBRC is planned for 1996. An updated version of the Recorders Policy is to be undertaken by the SBRC.
A working group has been set up to look at conferences, and the future of 21 Regent Terr., however we are still looking for volunteers to chair a working group for publicity and membership recruitment.
SOC members interested in forming links with like minded people from other countries should contact the office if willing to co-ordinate such a scheme. If it gets off the ground it could lead to useful birdwatching contacts.

Any member wishing to contact members in other areas may do so through the office.

Should the Recorders wish to have a meeting during the Annual Conference, we would be pleased to hear from somebody who is willing to organise it.

Endowment Fund Grants

SOC Endowment Fund Grants are awarded to SOC members who are planning to or already doing a specific project relating to ornithology in Scotland. It should also be remembered that groups and SOC branches can also apply for grants.
If you would like to apply for a grant from the SOC to assist with your project or study during 1996 please ask for an application form from -
SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.
Applications must be returned to 21 Regent Terrace by 31st October 1995.

Enclosed with this issue

Annual Report, Winter Syllabus 1995/96, Outings list, Conference Booking Form, Raffle tickets and for those members who do not pay by Bankers Order a Renewal Notice.
Should any of these not be enclosed please contact 21 Regent Terrace.

Angus Recorders

The following people form the committee for the Angus recorders network.
Allen Burnett - County Recorder., Mike Nicoll - Assistant Recorder., Stuart Rivers - Secretary, Rick Goater, Ken Slater, Keith Brockie, G Addison, Bob McCurley, Ron Downing and Bruce Lynch.

Celebration in Majorca

At the Stewartry Branch AGM members put forward ideas to celebrate the Branch's 20th and the Club's 60th anniversaries in 1996. A buffet supper, field trip to Strathspey or a Scottish Island, and a birdwatching holiday in Majorca next April were suggested. Hopefully all will take place and thus enable most Branch members to take part in at least one event.

Some Stewartry members are particularly keen to arrange the Majorcan holiday. To get a reduced rate on our previous visit to the island we require a group of 20 and would like to be joined by members from throughout Scotland. Therefore places may be available on this holiday if not enough Stewartry members and friends apply.

The exact destination, date and cost for 2 weeks should be available in the autumn. Anyone interested? Please contact **Joan Howie, 60 Main Street, St. John's Town of Dalry, Kirkcudbrightshire DG7 3UW. Tel 01644 43026** ***as soon as possible.***

SOC Annual Raffle

It's the third and final year that Fife Branch is organising the raffle and we would like to go out with a bang, or at the very least do much better than last year's relatively poor performance. We trust, therefore, that you will attempt to sell all your ticket allocation and possibly return for more! Further tickets are available on request from **21 Regent Terrace** or from your own branch secretaries. As you will see from the tickets enclosed with this mailing, we have repeated last years formula, a first prize of £200 and a second prize of £100. We have already had pledges of a number of other prizes and look forward to receiving further donations from both branches and indivduals. Please note that, this year, all monies, ticket stubs and for that matter additional prizes should be sent to **Brian Downing, 51 Lade Braes, St Andrews, Fife KY16 9DA** or brought to the annual conference in Kingussie in November.

Scottish Ringers' Conference

The Lothian Ringing Group are organising this year's conference, the 21st, at the Fife Arms Hotel in Braemar from 17th-19th November 1995. Details of the programme and booking forms can be obtained from: **John Davies, Lothian Ringing Group, 31 Easter Warriston, Edinburgh EH7 4QX.**

Bill Harper

Bill Harper, the Club's dedicated librarian who has taken care of our superb library since 1977, has had to give up following a stroke. Any member interested in becoming Honorary Librarian should contact the office in the first instance. We are grateful to Frank Hamilton and Keith MacGregor who have been keeping an eye on the library recently - we are, of course, grateful to Bill and Hetty for all their hard work over the years. We also hope Bill will make a good recovery and will make sure that the Club keeps in touch with him.

Please check your address!!!

We would be very grateful if members could please check their address and let us know if any corrections are needed by sending the label back with the said corrections detailed. Also if you are willing to let us have your telephone number perhaps you could again state this on the label. Your assistance in this matter would be much appreciated.

Photographic Competition and Slide Show

Slight changes are being made to the Annual Photographic Competition this year, with all entries being judged prior to the Friday of the conference. The winning entries will be shown during the usual Friday evening slide show. Members wishing to enter the competition should send their entries to 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT by Friday 13th October at the latest.

Angus Hogg will chair the informal Friday evening slide show, he would however like to know how many people are likely to bring slides (limited to 15 per person) with them so he can organise a programme for the evening.

Thanks to

Thanks are due once again to the army of volunteers who willingly come into 21 every quarter and stuff envelopes. The stuffers for the June mailing included:- John Childs, Bob & Betty Smith and Joan Wilcox - apologies to anyone who has been missed out.
A big thank you also to Joan Wilcox, Harry Dott and Ray Murray for work in the 'overgrown' garden at 21. Frank Hamilton and Keith MacGregor for assistance in keeping the library running during Bill Harper's recent illness.
Anybody with some time to spare who would like to assist the club with various chores would be most welcome.

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BIRD

THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

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Edited by Sylvia Laing and
Stan da Prato
Assisted by Pamela Black

SMITHSONIAN
6 1996
LIBRARIES

Killing questions

As most members will be aware some landowners have been agitating for the power to reduce the numbers of certain raptors claiming that they are having a serious effect on stocks of prey species, notably grouse, as well as the rural economy. The arguments are not new. They were very popular in the past and it is disappointing to hear just how simplistic some people in positions of influence still are when it comes to ecology. If a raptor or seal eats grouse or salmon then that must mean less for us is the logic. Science seems to be a dirty word to some shooting interests unless it reinforces their prejudices. However, good science is essential for effective resource management and that has become the basis for the conservation case.

In a wide ranging speech to the Standing Conference on Countryside Sports in Battleby, Perth in October, Lord Selborne, Chairman of the UK Joint Nature Conservation Committee, reaffirmed that the 3 statutory conservation agencies will oppose any proposals for the licensed control of birds of prey. Acknowledging that concerns had been raised concerning the impact of Peregrines on racing pigeons, and, separately, of Hen Harriers on Red Grouse, Lord Selborne stressed the need for a clear scientific understanding of these interactions. This was in line with international obligations and would mean further research. Until this research, and other important current studies are completed, and the implications of the results considered, JNCC and the country agencies, including SNH, would not support moves to allow the licensed killing of raptors.

Golden Eagle *Dick Balharry*

Controlling factors

Lord Selborne said that in natural environments, the size of a predator population is normally controlled by the size of its prey population and not the other way round. The size of the prey population is normally controlled by other factors such as food supply or weather. Simplistic calculations of how many birds of prey there are, and how many prey items they are likely to take, are misleading.

"When finding our way through these problems we must always strive for solutions that are sustainable in the long term. It is inherently better, and certainly more cost-effective, to eliminate the cause of conflict passively, such as through redesign of pheasant release pens to reduce predation levels, than to require active control of predators at a site year after year. Such long term and strategic solutions to these problems will be more acceptable to a public increasingly aware of nature conservation than will be calls for the removal of statutory protection or other active control of protected species".

Habitat management

Lord Selborne stressed the need to pay more attention to habitat management rather than control of actual numbers. He reaffirmed that JNCC and the 3 country agencies would continue to support policies and initiatives which enhanced the nature conservation value of the British uplands and which would support the coexistence of healthy populations of birds of prey and their native gamebird quarry. At the same time, JNCC and the country agencies would continue to oppose the illegal killing of raptors which still occurs in some areas.

Working Group

Lord Selborne acknowledged the concerns that some had raised as to the impacts of birds of prey on legitimate country sports. He stressed that JNCC looked forward to working with representatives of country sports through its joint chairing of the recently established Department of the Environment Working Group on Birds of Prey. This Group will explore the issues in depth and seek to find solutions acceptable to all interested parties. It arose from an

Statistics on British raptors

Species	Population UK	Scotland	Trends	Low point in the UK (date)	Cause	European Pop 1000s	% Eur in UK
Honey Buzzard	15-30	Unknown	static	extinct? (1900-1910)	persecution	110-160	-
Red Kite	165	15	increase	4 pairs (1903)	persecution	19-37	0.2
Sea Eagle	10	10	slow increase	extinct (1916-1975)	persecution	3.3-3.8	0.3
Marsh Harrier	118	few	increase	extinct (1900-1911)	persecution	48+	0.2
Hen Harrier	660	570	static/decline?	50-60pairs (c1920-1940)	persecution	22-32	2.4
Montagu's Harrier	7	few	static	extinct (1974-1975)	persecution	26-42	-
Goshawk	400	?	increase	extinct (1883-1950)	persecution	130+	0.3
Sparrowhawk	32000	?	regional increase	0-50% (1961-1963)	pesticides	270+	-
Buzzard	12-17000	?	regional increase	limited to the west	persecution	740+	2.0
Golden Eagle	425	420	static	150 pairs (1945)	persecution	5.0-7.2	7.2
Osprey	95	95	increase	extinct (1916-1954)	persecution	7.1-8.9	1.2
Kestrel	50000	?	static		pesticides	290-490	-
Merlin	1000	600	increase	?550pairs (1950-1985)	pesticides ?	34+	-
Hobby	500-1000	?	increase	50-90 pairs (1900-1950)	persecution	58+	1.2
Peregrine	1300	639	increase	c360pairs (1963)	pesticides	6.2-10.0	13.8

exploratory meeting in April attended by representatives of about 30 organisations. As a result of the meeting the Government proposed that the forum should meet annually, and that a smaller working group should be set up to examine the facts and and identify possible action. The forum meeting in April was attended by 6 non-governmental organisations (NGO's) with primarily wildlife conservation rather than game or pigeon interests: the BTO, The Hawk and Owl Trust, The National Trust, The RSPB, The Scottish Raptor Study Groups and the Suffolk Wildlife Trust. Some of the data prepared for the working group is shown in the table.

Limiting factors

Of the factors that are currently limiting raptor populations, the working group has identified persecution as the most severe. An indication of the scope of the illegal persecution problem is given by the number of incidents reported to the RSPB since 1979. These figures are the tip of the iceberg, because, for example, detailed research on Hen Harriers and Buzzards shows how persecution has seriously limited the populations of these species. As many of our readers will be aware there are still parts of Scotland where raptors are at best transients since any birds that try to colonise suitable habitat are killed.

Wider issues

It is important that ornithologists see current attempts to remove legal protection from birds of prey in a wider context. There is a deeply held belief among some landowners and keepers that they are the only people who really understand the countryside. Anyone with differing views is liable to be dismissed as a hopelessly emotional townie. Often these views are part of more general attitudes to the private ownership of land and a perceived need to oppose a whole range of measures and issues ranging from European Community Directives (though not subsidies!) through planning and other regulations to pressure groups concerned with animals and birds, both wild and domestic.

Hen Harrier *Jeff Watson*

Facts and prejudice

We should not underestimate the ability of sporting interests to lobby politicians and other decision makers. We can, however, make sure that the public have access to facts to counterbalance prejudice. For example, the attempt to gain public support for killing raptors by claiming they kill too many song birds should be shown up for the red herring it is. There is no good evidence that any passerine population is held down by birds of prey, or even some of the species, such as Crows and Magpies, that can be legally controlled. There is some evidence that some ground nesting birds, such as waders, can be adversely affected by corvids in situations where the habitat has been manipulated. Creating Heather moorland by burning and then planting conifer strips nearby, is one common example.

Research in progress such as that around Langholm should show whether much rarer birds, such as Hen Harriers, have any significant effect on species such as Red Grouse. When such results become available we shall bring them to members attention. This issue is critically important to conservation in Scotland.

Stan da Prato

Red Kites

It has been another very good year for Red Kites in the Scottish Highlands. The young which fledged in 1994 survived their first winter well and at least 10 of the 13 young were still alive in early April 1995. The 1995 breeding season produced more successes with the first successful breeding attempt by 3 wild bred kites from Scotland. There were 4 clutches from 4 eggs. Clutches of this size are rare and indicate good feeding conditions prior to laying. The number of young produced increased to 26, compared to 13 in 1994.

Dispersal of wild bred chicks

Of the 13 wild young fledged in 1994, one was killed by a car soon after fledging, 2 dispersed to the southwest in October and the remaining 10 stayed within the core area all winter. White 7 was identified near Ballachulish, Fort William, in October. Another wing tagged kite (probably white 4) was seen flying south west over Loch Lochy, near Spean Bridge, also in October. White 4 was identified at Loch Gruinart Reserve on Islay on 17 October 1994. A white tagged kite was later seen in Perthshire. Of the 10 other young that used the winter roost, only 2 remained in the core area after April and both of them paired up with older males.

Winter roost

The winter roost built up gradually between October and Christmas. This may have been partly due to the mild early winter in 1994. From mid January to the end of March up to 33 Red Kites attended the roost on some nights. At least 45 individuals visited the roost over the winter.

Overview

Between 1989-1993, 93 Red Kites were released in the Highlands; 33 are still alive near the release area and 24 have bred. Sadly, 16 kites have been recovered dead. The fate of the 44 remaining is unknown. Breeding started in 1992 when one pair reared one chick. In 1993, 5 breeding pairs reared 7 chicks. In 1994, 8 breeding pairs reared 13 chicks and in 1996, 15 breeding pairs reared 26 chicks. This means that, to date, 47 Red Kites have been reared in the wild in Scotland since the reintroduction programme began; 32 of the wild bred kites are known to be still alive and only one has been found dead.

Sightings

You may be able to identify the colour of the wing tags on any kite you see. The colours used to date are as follows: Orange 1989, Blue 1990 (with black letters, only 4 are known to be alive), Yellow 1991, Lime Green 1992, Red 1993, White 1994 and Blue 1995 (with white letters). All the tags used since 1992 have small colour bars at the end of each tag also. The information required is the date, place, colour of the tags on the left and right wings and, if possible, the letters or numbers on the tags of any kite you see. **Lorcan O'Toole, Red Kite Project Officer, RSPB North Scotland Office, Etive House, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW**

Red Kite *RSPB*

Breeding Productivity

Productivity figures for the 1995 season are as follows:

No. of territories occupied	22
No. of pairs which laid eggs	15
Mean clutch size (from 10 nests)	3.1
No. of nests which fledged young	11
Mean no. of young/successful pair	2.4
% of breeding pairs which fledged young	73.3%

These figures are similar to results from other Red Kite populations across Europe and confirm that Scotland has suitable Red Kite habitat and would still have a large population of Kites were it not for persecution in the past.

Disease among Goshawks

A reference in the 1993 *Scottish Bird Report* to a disease with the strange name Frounce affecting Goshawks in NE Scotland has prompted a letter from Dr Ken Brewster. Further information has been supplied by Dr Steve Petty who co authored a paper on the subject in 1988 (*Journal of Wildlife Diseases* 24(1): 80-87) The proper name for the condition is Trichomoniasis caused by the flagellate protozoan parasite *Trichomonas gallinae*. It is abundant in domestic pigeons. There seem to be different strains of the parasite, some more virulent than others, while some birds may be immune. The disease particularly affects the mouth and gullet where lesions may occur. Death usually results from starvation or secondary infection.

In North America , Goshawks from the muskeg periodically erupt when Rabbits and woodland grouse are scarce. This brings them into contact with pigeons from where they often acquire a lethal infection. In other parts of Europe Ken thinks Goshawks may have at least partial immunity. British Goshawks are thought to have originated in Finland where their prey would not normally include pigeons; this may explain the apparent lack of immunity in British Goshawks compared to other populations and to species such as the Peregrine which regularly take Feral Pigeons.
Should anyone have more information on this, they could write to **Dr K W Brewster, 102 Kingsbury Road, Erdington, Birmingham B24 8QU.**

Food Piracy by Raven on Merlin

During a midmorning visit to Toab, Shetland on 27 September 1993, 2 Ravens flew overhead and started croaking continuously. On looking up I noted that one Raven was persistently mobbing a female Merlin. After about 2 minutes the Merlin dropped a Skylark sized prey item which the Raven immediately swooped on and caught in mid air. The Merlin flew off north while the Raven flew off west with the prey.

Bob Proctor

Unusual going ons with Highland Buzzards

Large numbers of Buzzards breed at fairly high densities on the coastal plain of East Ross and East Inverness. Several breeding populations in the area have been surveyed by Highland Raptor Study Group members for a number of years. Commonly clutch sizes are 2 or 3 with a few 4's. Those nesting in areas with a dense Rabbit population tend to lay the largest clutches. During 1995, 2 clutches of 5 were recorded. Malcolm Harvey located a nest in Strathglass with 5 eggs which, unfortunately, failed to hatch. Kenny Graham found a brood of 5 in a nest in a large oak tree close to a Rabbit warren near Dingwall. All 5 young from this nest subsequently fledged, no doubt aided by the abundant food supply; the nest was found to contain the remains of numerous young bunnies. Close to Invergordon, David Butterfield was surprised to find 2 occupied Buzzard nests only 17 metres apart in the same wood. One nest produced 3 chicks to fledging and the other 2 chicks. It is likely that the male bird was bigamous, but this was not proven.

East of Tain lies a large open grassy area known at the Morrich Mor. This area also supports a dense rabbit population but has virtually no trees. In one isolated pine a pair of Buzzards nested in an old crow's nest, mainly constructed out of fence wire, including, rather uncomfortably for the chicks, barbed wire. This pair reared 4 young mainly on a diet of young Rabbits, but a juvenile Swallow was also observed as a prey remain. Close to this site is an old wartime airfield. Whilst exploring the derelict air control tower Chris Tran was surprised to note a very anxious adult Buzzard calling overhead. When I checked the tower the next day, I found that a Buzzard was nesting on the roof of the building. It had made a scrape in some grass growing on the corner of the flat roof some 12m above ground level. There were no sticks in the nest, but a few bits of dry coarse grass and 2 small chicks. Unfortunately, only one of these fledged, the other being found dead at the foot of the building, having presumably walked over the edge of the roof to its untimely death. ***BWP*** makes no mention of Buzzards nesting on buildings so this may well be the first documented record.

Finally, during a long study of Buzzards in the Highlands, Brian Etheridge and myself recorded 226 Buzzard clutches (Swann & Etheridge 1995, *Bird Study* 42: 37-43). Only 12 of these were single egg clutches and all 12 failed to hatch, many being deserted shortly after laying. We assumed that these single egg clutches were laid by birds in very poor condition. Spring 1995 was characterised by cold NE winds and this may have resulted in birds being in poor condition, especially in areas with few Rabbits. I found a nest in such an area near Inver where a bird had laid only a single egg. To my surprise, however, this egg hatched a chick subsequently fledged.

Buzzard populations in the area are obviously thriving and these records, although on the unusual side, show that where there is a good food supply they will continue to expand their range and, if not persecuted, prosper.

Bob Swann

Unusual Buzzard nesting site
Bob Swann

DNA testing helps wildlife research

Genetic fingerprinting techniques, pioneered in criminal investigations, are to be used to help study some of Scotland's wildlife. A £1 million DNA wildlife laboratory has opened at Aberdeen University. Ecologists and biologists will combine skills in a conservation project based on advanced DNA techniques. Initial research will focus on Scotland's Otter, Red Grouse and Water Vole populations. The ecological molecular genetics laboratory is a joint project involving the university's departments of zoology, molecular and cell biology, and the Natural Environment Research Council's Institute of Terrestrial Ecology at Banchory.

One of the topics to be studied is how Scotland's scattered Otter populations survive. Previous studies have been hampered by the difficulties of catching and tagging the animals. By identifying individual Otters from DNA in their droppings researchers can collect information about all the animals in a study area.

The second study will focus on the fluctuations of Red Grouse numbers on Scottish estates, a topic which has long intrigued ecologists. Variations may be caused by dominant males from the same family extending their territories at the expense of other birds. If males who set up territories on a hillside are all related birds they may keep out those that do not share their genes. Other grouse are forced on to poorer territories, but a lot of birds just disappear off the hillside and little is known of what happens to them.

Water Voles will be the subject of the third study. Predation by escaped Mink has contributed to the extinction of Water Voles in the lower reaches of Scotland's rivers. A few populations survive in headwaters of the Ythan, Dee and the Don in Grampian. The genetics of these isolated populations, which are at risk of dying out, may lead to an understanding of how Water Voles throughout Scotland can be helped to survive.

Breeder jailed for trade in Peregrines

A registered keeper of Peregrines who bought Peregrine eggs from a Scottish gamekeeper and went on to sell the birds for profit was jailed for 4 months in September. Peter Gurr of Rainham, Essex, received concurrent 4 month terms on 6 counts of selling wild birds, to which he pleaded guilty, under the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1985 after a £9,000 police operation, codenamed Dutch Lady, which involved raids on falcon owners and DNA testing to determine the birds' parentage.

The charges arose from a police operation on 27 February 1994, when blood samples were taken from about 49 Peregrines; 30 were chicks, the rest parents. The samples were submitted for DNA comparison and, of the 18 offspring which had been registered by Gurr in 1993, 16 were not related to any of the registered parents. Gurr had bought 9 eggs in the 1993 breeding season from a source in Scotland and then registered them as the offspring of his captive parent birds. He told police he had been approached on a holiday in Scotland by a gamekeeper who said the eggs would be destroyed otherwise. Gurr met him at Scotch Corner, near Darlington, and bought the eggs for £150 each. He incubated and hatched the eggs and later sold the birds for between £390 and £550.

Attention was first drawn to Gurr because of his high success rate. If his figures were true, he had a breeding success of 75%, whereas the average is 25%. This led the RSPB to investigate, then the police became involved. An RSPB investigations officer said after the case: "We are delighted with the trouble the Metropolitan Police have gone to in what is a serious conservation issue. The judge has reflected that by imposing a custodial sentence".

The police operation was named after Dutch Lady, a Peregrine used in falconry in the 19th century.

Pine Martens at Inversnaid, Loch Lomondside .. the sequel

In *SBN* in March 1993, I wrote about Pine Marten predation of nestboxes at the RSPB'S reserve at Inversnaid, on Loch Lomondside. Predation started in 1989 when Pine Martens made a welcome return to the area after 168 years. Despite attempts to design a marten proof box, the raids continued. Then, in the summer of 1993, I heard about a completely new type of box from Neil Metcalfe of the Zoology Department at Glasgow University. He had been using them at the University Field Station, Rowardennan. Although Pine Martens had not reached his part of Loch Lomondside, the boxes were very useful in deterring Great Spotted Woodpeckers.

The nest boxes are made of a mixture of pine sawdust, burnt clay and concrete. treated with a coat of non toxic paint. Such boxes are resistant to weather and predators and, unlike wood, completely rot proof. The "woodcrete" material also allows excellent respiration, thus reducing fluctuations in temperate and preventing condensation. In the winter of 1993/4 the RSPB purchased 21 of these boxes, assisted by a grant from Central Regional Council. These boxes incorporated a new design with a front panel, particularly well protected against mammalian predators. This involves a recessed entrance hole that makes it impossible for a Marten to put its paw into the box and pull out the contents. The following summer 17 of the new nestboxes were used by Pied Flycatchers, Great and Blue Tits and not one of them was predated. By comparison, one third of the remaining wooden boxes were ransacked by Pine Martens. The results in 1995 were very similar, although one of the "woodcrete" boxes failed; the reason for this is unclear.

These "woodcrete" nestboxes are also very effective at deterring other predators, notably woodpeckers and squirrels. The only drawbacks are cost and appearance. The design of that the RSPB uses at Inversnaid cost £16.95 each, although it must be remembered that their life expectancy is much longer than a wooden box. There is one other minor drawback that I quickly discovered: "woodcrete" boxes are extremely heavy! The ones that we use weigh 14 pounds each; not easy to carry up the steep slopes of Inversnaid! Nevertheless, we are so satisfied with their performance that the remaining wooden boxes will all be replaced with "woodcrete" ones for the 1996 season. Once again, Central Regional Council has very kindly agreed to finance this project, for which the RSPB is extremely grateful.

Marten proof nestbox

Mike Trubridge

The Pine Martens meanwhile are still thriving. Unfortunately, they are still very elusive to see. In the 6 years that they have been resident at Inversnaid, I have only had one brief sighting. There have been a couple of sightings by visitors to the reserve, but if you are planning a trip to Inversnaid to see Martens, you may well be disappointed.

Mike Trubridge

If anyone would like further details of "woodcrete" nestboxes and the range of Schwegler products, please contact **Jacobi Jayne & Company, Hawthorn Cottage, Maypole, Hoath, Canterbury, Kent, CT3 4LW. Tel: 01227 860388.**

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The gull problem

The hot weather in summer 1995 was accompanied by an outcry in the local press against the growing nuisance caused by roof nesting gulls in Aberdeen. Probably while in fine weather the birds feed at sea, and when it is bad inland, at that time it was both so misty at sea and so dry inland that little food could be found in either direction, and unusual numbers began to feed in Aberdeen instead. There were a number of familiar suggestions for solving the problem, such as scaring the birds instead of feeding them, destroying or poisoning their eggs, and clearing up the garbage on which they feed, though nobody dared suggest poisoning. Finally, it was suggested that they might be included among the game hunted and consumed by tourists.

When I wrote applauding this "modest proposal", which seems a much better way to use the resources consumed by the pursuit of our declining gamebirds, it was taken up by a reporter who had evidently never heard of Dean Swift's original "modest proposal" that the Irish might avoid famines by eating their babies. She consulted the sanitary authorities, who reported that gulls are full of toxins (which should be destroyed by cooking), and then the RSPB, who dismissed the idea as "bizarre". In point of fact, prehistoric Scottish middens are full of gull bones, while when Henry VIII entertained the King of France and Count of Flanders to a feast of birds at Calais in 1532 he was ready to pay 18d for gulls, Bitterns, Spoonbills and Curlews, compared to 72d for Cranes and Storks, 48d for Bustards, and 20d for Herons and Pheasants, but only 4d for geese, 3d for ducks and 1d for chickens, so that gulls must once have been fairly highly regarded as food.

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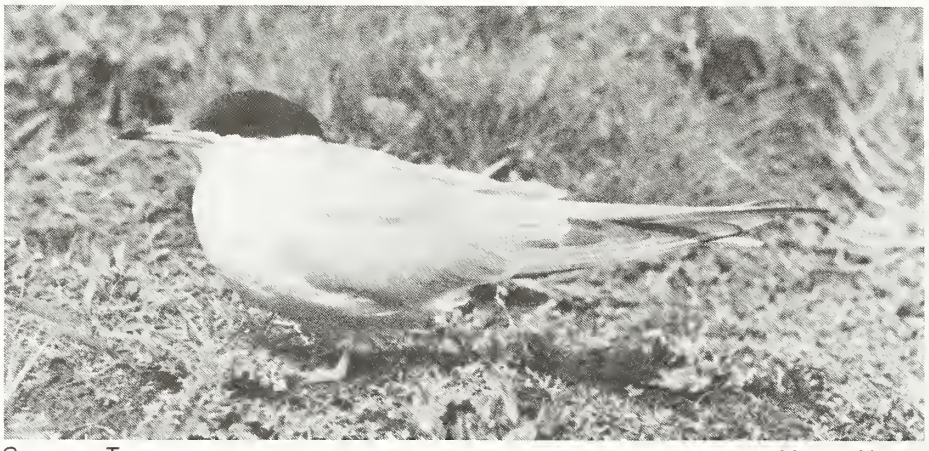


Common Tern *Martyn Hayes*

Chinese sailors still catch gulls with a hook and line for the pot, and they are also eaten in Scandinavia, with no evil consequences. They were hunted in Britain until it became illegal a century ago, after which they first began to appear on the Thames in winter within a couple of years. It has taken much longer for them to start breeding in towns, which, together with some other birds, such as crows, they originally appear to have avoided because they were afraid of hunters. Their numbers on land were probably also kept down by ground predators, especially Foxes, so that they had to breed on cliffs and islands. Then, with the arrival of myxomatosis and virtual elimination of Rabbits in the 1950s, the ground predators declined, and the gulls, which had begun to profit greatly from improvements in agriculture and the careless disposal of garbage, were able to start nesting in many new places, notably on rough ground inland. Now, with the return of Rabbits and their predators, they have found that it has become safer to breed on roofs.

The problem in towns is that gulls are social animals, so that while the first pair may be reluctant to settle, if they succeed in breeding they are likely to be joined by all their friends and relations, who no longer take much notice of minor attempts to evict them. Therefore, if they are not wanted it seems best to try and stop them settling in the first place, because once they have done so the only treatment may be either to cause a continual disturbance, which is difficult on rooftops, or to remove a really large number of birds, so that the breeding colony is broken up, by hunting, trapping or poisoning, which the public seem unlikely to tolerate. They have been putting up with Feral Pigeons for millennia, and it will be interesting to see whether they are prepared to endure noisier, messier gulls for as long.

W R P Bourne

Predation on terns

For some years now, Clive Craik has been monitoring the breeding success of seabirds, especially gulls and terns, at colonies between Kintyre and Mallaig. He reports that 1995 was a particularly favourable one for terns from the point of view of food. Chick weights and growth rates were exceptional. However comparatively few terns bred compared with previous years and the largest colony - 530 pairs of Common Terns - failed completely. Clive believes this to be due to predation, possibly by Feral Mink and definitely by Otters.

A swan around

On 26 September 1994 I, along with members of the Macgregor Bird Group, were checking out the regular flock of Whooper Swans that frequent fields south of North Berwick, East Lothian. A bird with a yellow neck collar showing 3J56 was quickly picked out and the record subsequently sent to Bjerke Laubek of the Natural Environment Research Institute in Denmark who was collecting information on birds marked in August 1994 in East Iceland caught when moulting. A reply revealed that this was an adult female ringed on 13th August and which had been reported by other observers in the same area of East Lothian up until early December.

My wife and I visited Denmark this autumn and, whilst bird watching on the Vejlerne reserve in North Jutland, were approached by a Danish observer and, in the course of conversation, we found to our surprise he was in fact Bjerke Laubek! He said he would check on any further news of 3J56. A subsequent letter advised us that the Whooper had moved from East Lothian to County Louth in the Irish Republic by 8

January 1995 where it was seen until mid February. It was then reported in Northern Ireland on 8 April at Carrickfergus, no doubt on its way back to Iceland. It will be interesting to see if it repeats its autumn journey to East Lothian this year.

Keith Macgregor

Corncrakes increase

The Corncrake is a globally endangered species which has suffered a dramatic decline throughout Europe. For the second year running, however, its numbers have increased in parts of Scotland. Numbers in Orkney increased from 20 calling males in 1994 to 37 this year. Lewis showed a slight increase to 96 and the islands from North Uist south to Barra and Vatersay an increase from 159 to 178. On Tiree, in the Inner Hebrides, numbers rose from 126 to 140, and on neighbouring Coll from 25 to 37.

By 1978 there were fewer than 750 calling males in Britain, falling to 574 in 1988 and 480 in 1993. There was no complete count in Britain in 1995 but extrapolation from counted areas suggests about 570 calling males. Corncrakes have not bred in Northern Ireland since 1993 but, following a 5 year decline, there has been a 30% increase to 174 calling males in the Irish Republic.

Pioneering work on the RSPB reserve on Coll, now widely followed elsewhere, has shown how the provision of rough vegetation cover by excluding grazing benefits Corncrakes in spring and early summer. Both the date and method of hay or silage cutting endanger Corncrakes, and especially their young. For the last 4 years the RSPB, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Crofters Union have run the Corncrake Initiative, a scheme which pays crofters and farmers to cut hay or silage after July 31 and encourages them to use Corncrake friendly mowing techniques to reduce the risks to the birds from farm machinery. European funds are being used to pay for fieldwork, reserve management, especially on Coll, and for the provision of advice. Some of the areas where Corncrakes have increased are within the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) in the Uist machairs and the Argyll Islands west of Kintyre. It is hoped that the ESA mechanism will be enhanced to deliver effective Corncrake management and allow the need for the Corncrake Initiative to be would up. ESAs must also embrace all important Corncrake areas in Scotland; at present they do not cover vital areas such as Orkney or Lewis and Harris.

Corncrake *Mike Ashley*

No of calling Corncrake males

	1988	1993	1994	1995
Orkney	33	6	20	37
Lewis	71	106	89	96
Harris	5	4	7	8
Berneray	2	2	0	0
North Uist	58	66	51	53
Benbecula	23	17	19	23
South Uist	96	50	49	58
Barra and Vatersay	59	26	40	44
Skye	27	8	9	9
Canna	2	3	2	0
Rhum	0	1	0	0
Eigg	0	1	2	0
Muck	0	1	1	0
Coll	20	20	25	37
Tiree	101	111	126	140
Mull	3	1	1	0
Iona	3	4	3	4
Colonsay and Oronsay	18	10	6	12
Islay	19	9	13	14
Totals	540	446	463	535
GB total where known	574	480	?	?570

An Comann Rioghail Aisson Dion nan Eun agus Aonadh Nan Croitearan

The fact that An Comann Rioghail Aisson Dion nan Eun has joined forces with Aonadh Nan Croitearan to publish a report may not immediately attract ornithological interest; the Gaelic names of the RSPB and Scottish Crofters Union are unfamiliar to many readers. However the report is of considerable interest especially when seen in the context of recent controversies in the Highlands and Islands where conservationists have often been accused of lack of sensitivity to the local way of life.

The crofting environment

The Highlands and Islands are scenically magnificent. They are varied geologically and contain some of our oldest rocks and fossils. While woodland cover has been much reduced, the region contains many woodland fragments where native tree species, such as Birch, Oak, Ash and Scots Pine, still flourish. The region also contains coastal grasslands, a great deal of moorland and some of the most extensive blanket bogs and peatlands in the world. These various habitats are associated with animals such as Otter, Wildcat, and Pine Marten, as well as significant populations of breeding birds such as Golden Eagle, Corncrake, Dunlin, Whimbrel and Greenshank. The waters around the crofting areas support an immense diversity of marine life including internationally important populations of seabirds. These features, which in some cases have been conserved by crofting land use, give crofting communities a strong claim on the financial resources now beginning to be directed towards more environmentally sensitive types of agricultural support.

Oystercatcher nesting on croft land *David Hassell*

The wilderness fallacy

The Highlands and Islands are often described as wilderness. This is unscientific. Almost every landscape in northern Scotland bears the mark of human influence. Many agree that areas now uninhabited once held sizable communities. Their populations were expelled forcibly by landlords during the Highland Clearances. Crofters and others still dream of winning back these lost lands. There is no environmental reason why some resettlement should not occur. Reforms should make it possible to combine an element of resettlement with woodland regeneration and other measures designed to rehabilitate habitats which have been seriously degraded since the Clearances.

The Clearances

Crofting began when 19th century landlords removed many thousands of families from inland parts of the Highlands to make way for sheep farms. People were resettled on coastal small holdings which became known as crofts. Landlords were then earning large incomes from the kelp industry and the crofters were expected to provide a kelping workforce. Crofts were deliberately laid out in such a way as to make it impossible for their occupiers to earn a full time income from agriculture. Crofters have remained part time farmers ever since.

Vulnerability

Crofting has always been vulnerable. When the kelp industry collapsed crofters were left in extreme poverty. The need to do something about the crofting areas was brought about by disorders which broke out in the Highlands and Islands in the 1880s. The crofting population, organised by the Highland Land League, demanded that crofting occupancy be safeguarded by law. This was done by the Crofters Act of 1886.

After 1886 no government was willing to contemplate the complete disappearance of crofting. Crofters became eligible for a share of the generous agricultural support payments made available after the Second World War. However crofting continued to decline. This was because of incompatibility between the objectives of UK and EC farming policy and the highly specific needs of crofting. Both UK governments and the European Commission were committed, until the 1980s, to agricultural support systems geared to the production of more and more food. Such measures could not be applied easily to crofting, without removing the security of tenure and other provisions of the 1886 Act as well as its 1995 successor and subsequent legislation.

The Crofters Commission was set up in 1955. It is responsible for the regulation of crofting. The Commission was also given the job of promoting the economic development of crofting communities. The tools available, however, consisted solely of the package of agricultural grants which did not come to grips with the part time nature of farming throughout the crofting areas.

Rethinking policy

The present rethinking of rural policy offers crofting an important opportunity to rationalise and streamline its administrative structure. This has become immensely

complicated. A list of the bodies and agencies now involved includes the Scottish Land Court, the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department, the Crofters Commission, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Local Enterprise Companies, the European Commission, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Red Deer Commission and the local authorities.

When the UK and European countryside was viewed primarily in terms of food production the case for crofting was undoubtedly weak. Now that both the UK government and the European Commission are placing more stress on the need to create a diversified rural economy and a more attractive countryside, the case for crofting has been transformed. The crofting areas had comparatively little to offer nationally and internationally in food production terms. As a model of how rural communities can be organised in ways which both safeguard the natural environment and permit the integration of agriculture with a wide range of other activities, the crofting experience is outstanding.

Crofting communities

Despite so much depopulation, crofting communities are more densely populated than comparable areas elsewhere. This is because crofts are much smaller than farms. A piece of land which, in other parts of Britain, might contain one or two farms can accommodate several dozen crofts. That is why some crofting communities in the Western Isles are more densely populated than any other rural locality in Britain outside the suburban south of England. Because they manage their land at a low intensity, however, these crofting communities coexist with valuable natural habitats. Those features which were once thought to be weaknesses are revealed as strengths. By enabling crofting areas to retain comparatively high numbers of people, and by allowing these people to combine their farming with other occupations, the Hebrides, the West Highland mainland, Orkney and Shetland are diversified rural communities.

Importance of machair

There is a connection between the small scale, low input nature of crofting agriculture and the extent to which crofting communities exist alongside some of Europe's outstanding natural habitats. Thus traditional management techniques have preserved the flower and bird rich machairs of the Hebrides. Indeed management of this type is essential to maintain this internationally unique resource.

Machair is the single most distinctive contribution which the crofting areas make to the natural environment. Here and there in Lewis, more generally in Harris and more universally still in islands like the Uists, Barra, Vatersay, Tiree and Iona, the sea and wind together have carried great quantities of sand inland. This sand is rich in calcium carbonate, which fertilises the highly acidic peat with which it comes in contact. Many flowers flourish on the resulting soils. The overall effect, rendered still more striking by the generally unproductive nature of the surrounding landscape, is like an oasis in the desert. In summer the machair holds breeding Corncrake, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Lapwing, Dunlin, Snipe, Redshank, Skylark and Corn Bunting. In winter it provides habitat for migrant waders and geese.

Crofting and wildlife in Shetland

In Shetland, the most northerly part of the British Isles, crofters have traditionally managed both their moorlands and their arable land in ways which have helped support nationally important populations of many wading birds, including Britain's only regularly breeding pair of Black-tailed Godwits of the Icelandic race, some 80-90% of Britain's small population of Red-necked Phalaropes and 95% of Britain's Whimbrels. Agricultural policy changes could help sustain Shetland's moorland, heathland and wetland habitats, and go some way to reversing the loss of habitat due to recent agricultural intensification. Shetland's seas are much richer and more productive than its land, supporting important populations of seabirds such as Great and Arctic Skua and Arctic Tern. An environmentally sensitive agricultural policy should ideally be accompanied by an environmentally sensitive policy for the management of fisheries and aqua culture, seabird populations being extremely vulnerable to overfishing.

Special needs

The particular needs of crofting communities require recognition on grounds other than those solely associated with agriculture and the environment. Despite some improvement in recent years, crofting areas continue to be socially and economically deprived by UK standards. Decades of outward migration have brought about the distortion of demographic patterns with older age groups disproportionately represented. Incomes are generally low. Housing conditions are often poor. Crofting districts contain some of the highest proportions of Below Tolerable Standard dwellings in Scotland. Too many crofting townships are characterised by low quality land use resulting from crofts being in the possession of aged, inactive or even absentee crofters.

Solutions

None of these things can be put right overnight. But such problems are soluble given a new willingness to devise policies which build on the crofting systems strengths and which recognise to the local population's wishes. The administrative

Pale phase Arctic Skua

Sam Alexander

Important bird species associated with crofting

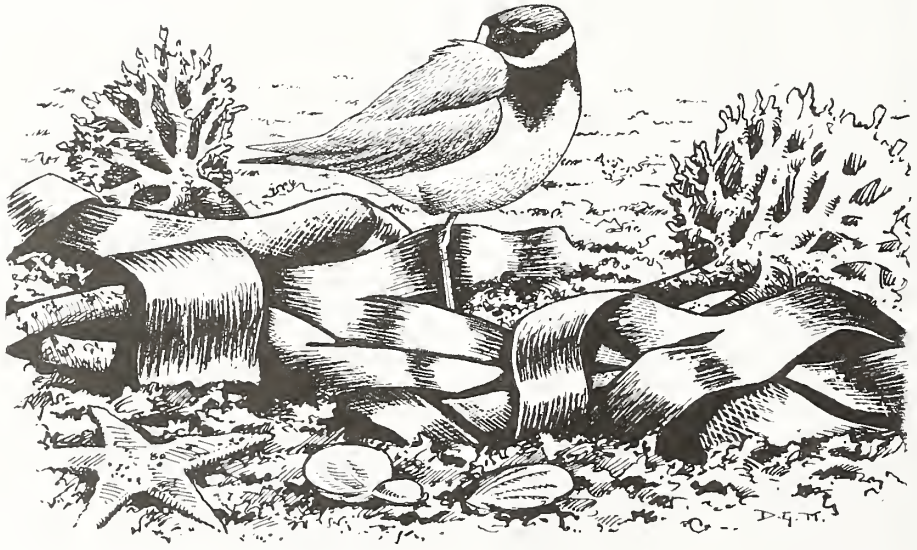
	Main habitat(s)	Total British population	% found in crofting counties	Main localities
White-fronted Goose (W)(4) (Greenland)	Peatland, Moorland, Pastures	14,500	95	Islay, Caithness & Tiree
Barnacle Goose (W)(4) (Greenland)	Pastures, Cereals	34,500	75	Islay, Uists
Greylag Goose (B) (native birds)	Pastures, Cereals, Root crops	2-3,000	100	Western Isles & Caithness/Suther
Pintail (B)	Lochs, Marshes	39prs	60	Orkney
White-tailed Eagle (B) *+	Open country, Coasts	6-11prs	100	Hebrides
Hen Harrier (B) +	Heather moorland	c600prs	40	All except Shetland
Golden Eagle (B) +	Open country	c420prs	80	All except N isles
Merlin (B) +	Heather moorland	c600prs	30-40	All
Black Grouse (B)	Moorland, Native woodland	<50,000prs	30-40	Strathspey
Capercaillie (B) +	Pinewoods	1-2,000	40	Strathspey
Corncrake (B) *+	Meadows	c480males	100	Hebrides
Oystercatcher (B)	Machair, Pastures, Coasts	33-43,000prs	40	All
Ringed Plover (B)	Machair, Pastures, Coasts	8-9,000prs	40	All
Golden Plover (B) +	Wet moorland, Pastures	c22,000prs	30	All
Dunlin (B)	Machair, Moorland	c9,000prs	30	All
Whimbrel (B)	Peaty moorland	c450prs	100	Shetland
Curlew (B)	Moorland, Pastures	30-40,000prs	20	Orkney
Redshank (B)	Machair, Marshes, Pastures	c30,000prs	30	All
Greenshank (B)	Wet peaty moorland	c900prs	95	Caithness/Sutherland & Lewis
Red-necked Phalarope (B) +	Marshes	10-20	100	Shetland
Arctic Tern (B) +	Pastures, Beaches, Moorland	c75,000	85	Shetland & Orkney
Great Skua (B)	Moorland	7-8,000prs	100	N & W Isles
Crested Tit (B)	Pinewoods	c900prs	80	Strathspey
Chough (B) +	Pastures	c200prs+c150	50	Islay
Twite (B)	Cereal stubble/weeds,Moorland	20-50,000prs	95	N & W Isles
Scottish Crossbill (B)	Pinewoods	c1,000prs	60	Strathspey

W=wintering B=breeding, * Species recognised as globally threatened, + Species included in Annex 1 of EC Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds
In addition, other species which are directly affected by agriculture and are of importance in the crofting areas include Snipe, Arctic Skua, Rock Dove, Raven and Corn Bunting. Other species which may be indirectly affected by crofting practices include Red-throated Diver, Black-throated Dive, Slavonian Grebe, Common Scoter, Red Grouse and seabirds such as terns and auks.

structure of crofting must be simplified. There needs to be much more integration of agricultural, environmental, cultural and development objectives. Above all, politicians and public agencies have to be persuaded of the very substantial merits of crofting in relation to those rural policy goals now being set at both the UK and EC level.

As this issue went to the printers the Secretary of State for Scotland announced that crofters would get the opportunity to buy land currently owned by the government. Not all crofters are able or willing to take on such responsibilities so moves to establish some sort of Trust to hold land on behalf of local communities is particularly interesting.

This article is largely based on a report published jointly by RSPB and the Scottish Crofters Union. A copy is in the SOC library.



Ringed Plover on the tideline *David Mitchell*

Birdwatching in the Outer Hebrides

Elsewhere in this issue we discuss some of the conservation and related issues affecting the Outer Hebrides. Here we offer readers a short summary of the birdwatching opportunities that exist on islands that we all know about but probably do not visit very often, especially outwith the summer holiday months.

The Long Island

Lewis and Harris are one island 60 miles by 30 miles. Harris consists mainly of comparatively high hills culminating in the Clisham (799m. 2,622ft), the highest point in the Outer Hebrides. Some parts of Lewis are similar but elsewhere Lewis has a great deal of moorland. The interior throughout is blanketed in peat with many lochs and burns. Along much of the Atlantic coast north of Stornoway is a fringe of arable land where windblown shell sand has neutralised the peat. On the east, both Lewis are Harris are indented by deep sea lochs but the west side has only 2 of any size, Lochs Roag and Resort.

The climate is mild and equable, owing to the North Atlantic Drift, but the prevailing south westerly wind often reaches gale force in winter and usually carries rain with it. Drier north easterly winds in spring often bring fine weather and May and June tend to be the best months of the year.

Birds on Lewis and Harris

Less than a 100 years ago Ptarmigan lived on the highest hills. Now they are extinct and Golden Eagles are the main attraction. These are still persecuted by shepherds but, largely due to the availability of dead sheep and deer, still hold their own. They can be seen from main roads in Uig and north Harris. The Common Buzzard is often mistaken for a Golden Eagle but a bird seen perched on a fence post is certainly a Buzzard! The Raven is a common bird of hill and moor. Red Grouse, Dunlin, Golden Plover, Snipe and Meadow Pipit are commonly met with on lower ground and, with luck, a passing Merlin or Peregrine.

Great and Arctic Skuas breed on the Gress moor and have colonised suitable territory elsewhere in Lewis. Curlew are spreading and Whimbrel breed sporadically. Red-throated Divers are common, especially in Lewis, but Black-throated Divers prefer larger lochs and only about a dozen pairs nest in Lewis. Both species are vulnerable to disturbance. Red-breasted Mergansers are commonly found breeding near moorland lochs and Goosanders have recently been found with young in Uig.

Red-throated Diver *Andrew Dowell*

Greylag Geese breed, mostly within flying distance of feeding grounds in and around Broadbay. Few lochs are without Common Sandpipers and Redshanks, but Greenshanks are less common. Cormorants feed on lochs near the coast.

Dippers frequent suitable streams. The Stornoway Woods are unique in the Outer Hebrides. They hold the only Rookery here and many passerines. Conifer plantations have been colonised by many passerine species including Crossbill. Apart from small shelter belts of conifers, the only trees are found on islets on fresh water lochs. These have survived due to immunity from sheep and muirburn.

Shags, gulls and many Black Guillemots breed on the coasts of Lewis and Harris. Small colonies of Guillemots, Razorbills and Kittiwakes are to be found on Tiumpan Head, the Butt of Lewis and other headlands. Fulmars are beginning to move inland to nest on abandoned black houses and Herring, Lesser and Great Black-backed Bulls have established large nesting colonies on moorland north and west of Stornoway. A few Little Terns nest near Stornoway and one of the largest colonies of Arctic Terns is near Stornoway airport, while others may be found at Tiumpan Head, Ness and Barvas and on inland lochs. Common Terns are much scarcer.

Southern Isles - machair

The machairs, areas of soil almost wholly made up of sand, lie immediately inland from the beaches of the north and west coasts. The machairs are used by the crofters in summer for crops. In winter they are grazed by sheep and cattle. Native Greylag Geese glean the stubble and families of Whooper Swans frequent the wetter areas. In late spring and summer wild flowers provide a spectacular environment for many waders, gulls and terns. Trefoil, Buttercups, Eyebright, Forget Me Not, Heartsease, Orchids and many others carpet the ground in colour. In the wetter areas, and around the shallow lochs, Bog Cotton, Marsh Marigold, Ragged Robin and Yellow Flag abound. Primroses are a speciality of Barra in spring.

Large numbers of breeding Oystercatchers, Ringed Plovers and Lapwings occupy the drier parts while the wetter areas are favoured by equally large populations of Dunlin, Snipe and Redshank. Ringed Plover and Lapwing are resident. The other species fly south in late summer and autumn, to be replaced by wintering populations from Iceland and elsewhere. Groups of migrant Ringed Plovers also occur on the machair in spring. Shelducks breed in rabbit burrows in many areas. Colonies of Black-headed and Common Gulls breed on the wet machair. Arctic and Little Tern are often found on

ploughed areas. Skylark and Meadow Pipit abound and smaller numbers of Corn Bunting occur. A few pairs of Corncrake breed in the machair, usually in the wetter parts, but strips of arable land are increasingly used as summer progresses. Outside the breeding season there are large flocks of Lapwing and Golden Plover. Curlew and Snipe are numerous and a few Jack Snipe are also present. Rock Doves fly from the east coast to feed in the stubble alongside flocks of Skylarks, Corn Buntings and swarms of Twite. They are often groups of Snow Buntings. The machairs are regularly hunted by Hen Harrier, Buzzard, Merlin and Peregrine with occasional visits from Gyrfalcon and Snowy Owl.

Many machair lochs, full of trout, hold breeding Mute Swans and Greylag Geese. Moorhen are also present. Whooper Swan, Wigeon, Gadwall and Pintail breed irregularly. Loch an Duin on North Uist and Loch Bee on South Uist are well known for large numbers of non breeding Mute Swans. Red-necked Phalaropes have not bred since 1987 and are now no more than irregular migrants.

Townships

These are immediately inland of machair areas. The land is mainly used for grazing and hay. Yellow Flag covers large parts of the wetter areas, making an ideal habitat for Corncrakes when they first arrive in late April. An increasing number of gardens and small shelter belts provide cover for resident passerines and for migrants.

Starlings nest wherever they can, such as in buildings and stone walls. House Sparrows, although very common, are less widespread. Blackbirds breed in very small numbers in most townships but the *hebridensis* race of the Song Thrush prefers those where natural cover is more extensive. The townships are also attractive to the *hebrideum* form of Dunnock, as well as Pied Wagtail, Stonechat, Wheatear and Robin. Wrens of the race *hebridensis* occur in all the townships. Collared Doves breed regularly. Twite breed in small numbers in most areas and Greenfinch have established themselves in a few localities in the Uists. Both Reed and Corn Buntings breed but the latter is absent from east coast townships and is localised elsewhere.

Moorlands

Moorland is the most widespread habitat. Rafts of water lilies are a feature of many moorland lochans. Red and Black-throated Divers breed, although the latter are scarce. Hen Harriers also breed, but numbers have declined drastically in recent years, probably as a result of illegal persecution. Golden Eagles, although persecuted, have generally fared better. Merlin and Short-eared Owl are fairly widespread. Greenshank occur in small numbers and Whimbrel are irregular breeders. There are small colonies of Arctic Skua on both North Uist and Benbecula.

Moorland lochs hold Common Sandpipers and Greylag Geese breed in deep heather around several of the larger lochs and on some islands. The latter are often covered in thick scrub suitable for small Heronries and the nests of Buzzard, Hooded Crow and Raven. Corvids are widely distributed and are heavily persecuted in the Uists. A few Kestrels breed on cliffs or steep gullies. Red Grouse are fairly scarce, a consequence of a wet climate. Golden Plover breed sparingly throughout the islands. Cuckoos are fairly common in spring and summer often pursued by Meadow Pipits. Passerines are scarce except for Wheatear, Wren and Stonechat.

The coast

The western seaboard of the Uists consists of an extensive sandy beach, broken by rocky outcrops. Offshore waters are generally shallow and between several of the islands the tides retreat totally, laying bare extensive tracts of sand known locally as traighs. Both the traighs and the beaches of the west hold large numbers of waders throughout the year. Waders are most numerous where concentrations of seaweed produce a supply of invertebrates. Other birds feeding in these areas include Shelduck, Eider, all of the common gull species, frequently joined by both Iceland and Glaucous Gulls in winter, Rock Pipits, Hoodies, Ravens and hordes of Starlings. Passerine migrants occur especially White Wagtails and Wheaters. Peregrines are often seen.

The east coasts consists of cliffs and sea inlets. The most numerous breeding species is the Fulmar. Several small Heronries are situated on seacliffs or islands. Golden Eagle, Peregrine and Raven breed on suitable cliffs. Rock Doves are found throughout.

Migrants

The relative lack of observers in the peak passage months mean that these are under recorded. Though not rare, the sight of hundreds of Sanderlings, Turnstones and other waders en route for the Arctic can be very fine. Many regular migrants are moving to or from Iceland, Greenland or parts of the American Arctic; Redwings, White Wagtails and Wheatear to name but 3 passerines. Many North American species must occur after westerly gales; to date some that have been recorded include Solitary, Buff-breasted and White-rumped Sandpipers, both Yellowlegs, several gulls and a number of passerines such as the Veery in autumn 1995.

Offshore

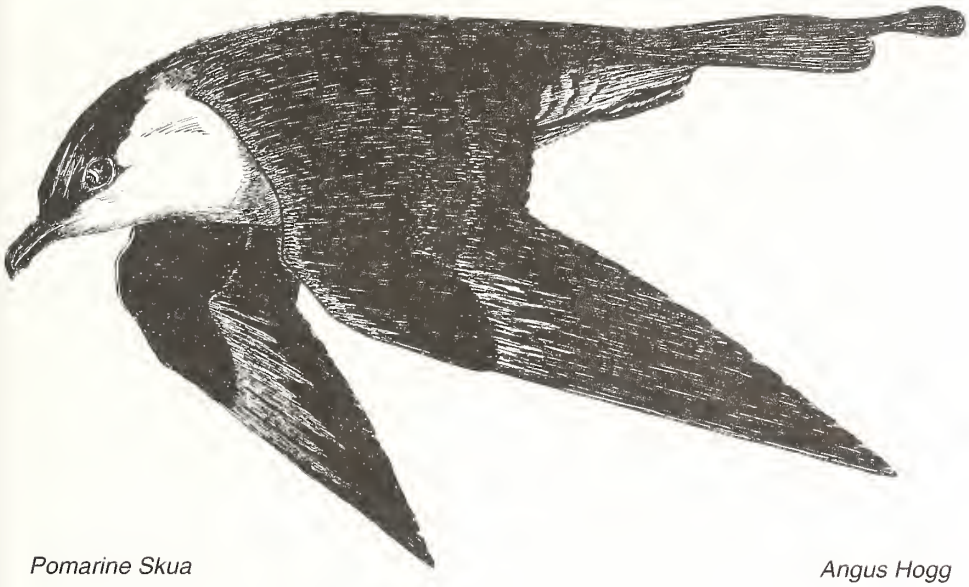
The seas around the Outer Hebrides are rich. Important seabird populations breed on the more remote islands. The car ferries that sail between the Outer Hebrides, the Scottish mainland and Skye are good platforms from which to watch seabirds. There are a few good land based seawatching sites all on the west coast: Aird an Runair on North Uist, Rubha Ardvule on South Uist and Griean Head on Barra.

In winter, seabird numbers are relatively low except for gulls. Any group of gulls should be checked for Iceland or Glaucous. A few adult Gannets stay on through the winter months. Numbers rise from late January. A few Little Auks may be seen in the Minch after bad weather. Great Northern Divers are common in winter. They are chiefly found in the Sounds and off the west coast. Rafts of Eider are common throughout the year and are joined in winter by Long-tailed Ducks.

Seabird numbers increase in spring including large numbers of Puffins. Manx Shearwaters can be seen daily in the Minch from mid March. By late April, skuas, terns and divers are passing through. Westerly winds from May to mid June may produce a few Pomarine and Long-tailed Skuas in the Minch, while the passage of these species off the west can be spectacular during suitable weather conditions.

As July progresses, young auks join their parents on the sea. Storm Petrels may be encountered in the Minch in summer, especially during calm evenings. They are seen frequently during periods of onshore winds. Leach's Petrels are rarely seen before autumn. Sooty Shearwaters appear with westerly winds from July onwards invariably flying south.

Autumn seawatching is often exciting. Gales from the west often funnel birds in to the bottleneck between North Uist and Skye. If conditions are rights, hundreds of Storm Petrels can be seen, together with all 4 skuas. Sooty shearwaters are almost guaranteed and Cory's, Great or



Pomarine Skua *Angus Hogg*

Mediterranean Shearwater are possibilities as are Leach's Petrel, Sabine's Gull or Grey Phalarope. During stormy weather in autumn, Rubha Ardvule comes in to its own. South westerly gales invariably produce large numbers of birds, including Sooty Shearwater and Leach's Petrel.

Marine mammals

Whales are not often seen from land but porpoises and dolphins are frequently encountered. Any flocks of Gannets or Kittiwakes should be investigated as they may pinpoint feeding cetaceans. The most frequently recorded dolphins are Bottle-nosed, Common, Risso's, White-beaked and White-sided. Of the toothed whales, Bottle-nosed, Killer and Pilot Whales are seen every year. The increased number of strandings of Sperm Whales in recent years suggest that this species is a regular migrant. Minke Whales are summer visitors but Basking Sharks are rarely sighted these days. Both Common and Grey Seals are widespread. Common Seals are more local and the species that is found on rocks in the sea lochs on the east coast, whereas any seal seen off the western seaboard is more likely to be a Grey. Otters are widespread and may be seen on fresh or saltwater throughout these islands.

Access and advice

From the naturalists' point of view the ferries are by far the best way to visit the Outer Hebrides. Once there, there is a good system of roads but remember that many are single track and passing/ overtaking require patience! Remember also that farmland does not necessarily look like the more intensively cultivated fields of mainland Britain. Use common sense and courtesy before walking on land that holds crops or livestock. Many visitors will use their cars and cars are a useful hide, especially for watching Corncrakes. Be aware that crows and gulls will take unguarded eggs or young so avoid disturbance. Most of these points will be second nature to SOC members. Outer Hebridean lifestyles are markedly different to the rest of the country on Sundays; the Sabbath is not a good day on which to disturb local people.

Further reading

This article was based on **Birdwatching in the Outer Hebrides**, an attractively produced 78 page book just published by Saker Press at £6.95. The text is written by SOC local recorders Peter Cunningham and Tim Dix with many illustrations by Philip Snow. It is part of a series on Scottish islands edited by Mike Madders. The book contains much more information than we can summarise here. There are maps, a checklist and advice on seeing specialities such as Corncrakes and passage Skuas.

Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay - Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist - almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodland garden of Colonsay House.

Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc. Camping and caravans are not permitted, but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hote cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating, private facilities, BTA Commended). Ro/Ro ferry for cars and foot-passengers ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (21/2 hour passage). Demi-pension from £60.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three comfortable self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £140.00 weekly.

On Tuesday and Thursday the 28ft launch 'MANDOLIN' takes small parties on Wildlife trips, usually accompanied by local naturalist John Clarke - £16.00 per person inc. VAT (simple lunch of bread, cheese and wine included).

THE HOTEL, ISLE OF COLONSAY, ARGYLL
(Kevin and Christa Byrne)
Telephone: Colonsay (019512) 316 - open all year

N.B. Booklet @ £3.50 inc. p&p describes the island's birds - 66pp plus 8pp colour photos.

Sea Eagle progress in 1995

The largest, and one of the most spectacular British birds of prey bred successfully again this year. Seven young Sea Eagles flew from nests in Scotland, equalling the record years of 1991 and 1992, and bringing the total of wild Sea Eagles fledged in Scotland since the reintroduction began in 1975 to 46. Ten territorial pairs laid eggs, including one pair which laid in an artificial eyrie, and a total of 5 pairs were responsible for raising the 7 young. One long established pair bred successfully for the first time after many years of failure, bringing the total number of successful breeding pairs to a record 6. Young birds raised in the wild in Scotland are now starting to enter the breeding population. An immature pair of such birds attempted to breed in 1995, but was unsuccessful.

Sea or White-tailed Eagles are one of the UK's rarest breeding birds. They ceased breeding in the UK in 1916, after a long period of persecution. Early last century an estimated 200 pairs nested along the north and west coasts of Scotland and Ireland. The last pair in Britain is said to have bred on the Isle of Skye where Iolaire suil na-grein - the eagle with the sunlit eye - can sometimes be seen hunting along the sea lochs. A reintroduction project, jointly undertaken by the then Nature Conservancy, now SNH, and the RSPB began 1975. Between 1975 and 1985 a total of 82 young sea eagles from Norway were released under licence on the island of Rhum.

Although this huge eagle is now re-established in Scotland, there are so far only 10 territorial pairs and only 6 pairs have successfully raised young. With such a tenuous foothold, the Sea Eagle Project Team felt it essential to release more young in order to give the population a more secure future. With the full support of the Norwegian authorities, a further 6 chicks were flown into Scotland this year, bringing the total released since 1993 to 26. The exact locations of eyries are kept confidential for obvious reasons. The locations of release cages are also kept confidential, both for quarantine purposes and to ensure that the young eagles do not become imprinted on people.

This year, chicks have been fitted with individually marked white wing tags to enable identification. Reports of any sightings and of tag details should be sent to **RSPB, North Scotland Regional Office, Etive House, Beechwood Park, Inverness, IV2 3BW. Tel 01463 715000** or **Roger Broad, RSPB, West of Scotland Science Park, Glasgow G20 0SP. Tel. 0141 945 5224.**

Wing tagged Sea Eagles *Laurie Campbell*

New species

The national press have something of a track record in inventing bird names. The latest to come to our notice is a cutting from *The Daily Telegraph* of 2/9/95 sent in by Pam Collett. The article describes the "The National Bird of Prey Centre" in Gwent in glowing terms. Apparently the centre breeds more predatory species than any other in the world. Since they claim to have bred the **European Scots Owl** for the first time that is not surprising.

More new species!

When typing us this issue, our office managed to invent several creatures including
Pigtail, Glaucous Bull, Red Bunting and **Mike Whale.** Could this be the inspiration for some cartoons?

Alien crayfish

The capture of a live American crayfish on the River Earn is worrying conservationists. The freshwater lobster, introduced to Britain in the 1970s to be farmed for restaurants, carries a fungus to which it is immune but which has wiped out local populations of Britain's only native crayfish and could harm other life including salmon and sea trout eggs.

The 8inch specimen found in the River Earn is being held in a tank at the Tay River Purification Board in Perth. Biologists have christened it Reggie Cray because it has escaped twice. On one occasion, the cleaner refused to go into the lab until it was recovered. It can survive out of water and cross land to move from stream to stream. It is now known whether there are just a few individuals or whether there is now a population in the Tay. It burrows into river banks and can cause erosion.

Estuary oil plans

The Trade and Industry Department has asked for comments on the possibility of permitting oil exploration in the Minches, the Solway Firth, Morecambe Bay, the Welsh Dee estuary, the Severn Estuary, the Thames Estuary, the Wash, the Humber Estuary and the Firth of Forth. All are special protection areas under the EU Habitats Directive, or are covered by the international Ramsar convention on wetlands.

Legal Chambers
Edinburgh

The Editor
Scottish Bird News
Scottish Ornithologists' Club
21 Regent Terrace
Edinburgh
EH7 5BT

Dear Sir

Walking through the Cairngorms

I have carefully read the above titled article which you published in September. Having consulted with my legal advisers, Messrs Robb & Fleecem, I give notice that **an Action for damages will now be taken in a court of law.**

Although not named in full, I am clearly recognisable as PRG in the text. The reference on the final page to my "revealing a lurid pair of boxer shorts on which a picture of Santa Claus was printed to a family party" **is a libel to which I take the strongest exception.** I not not possess or wear and never have possessed or worn a pair of under garments depicting Santa Claus whom I regard as a particularly unfortunate example of the commercialisation of traditional customs. Why you should choose to give gratuitous offence by implying that I deliberately removed my breeches in order to embarrass or offend complete strangers is a mystery to me.

It may be, of course (and here I am being charitable beyond any reasonable bounds) that you were simply mistaken. Failing eyesight is a common problem in people of your age, although I find it sad that those who refuse to recognise their myopia continue to claim to have seen birds and clog up the ornithological literature with their dubious or mistaken sightings. In support of this interpretation I offer the following facts, which can be vouchsafed by trustworthy witnesses:
On the date in question I did possess a pair of shorts tastefully depicting St Nicholas and *Rangifer tarandus.* Perhaps this is the garment I wore on the day? I honestly cannot remember. If so, I am sure that you, as a naturalist familiar with the wildlife of the area (despite you apparent inability now to recognise much of it) will agree that this was appropriate wear for the location. This pair of shorts is now kept under my kitchen sink and does service as a duster. I also possess a pair of Y fronts depicting young ladies disporting in beachwear, in the style of a well known television programme called *Baywatch* which I often study due to the opportunities it affords for the detailed study of pairs of Brown Boobies *Sula lustafter* in their natural habitat. It is also possible, but unlikely, that this was the garment to which you refer. By Easter 1994 those Y fronts were much faded, however, and it is possible that, with you failing eyesight, you mistook these charming examples of womanhood for Santa Claus. This garment is currently reserved solely for wearing with my Highland Dress.

I trust that you will make appropriate and speedy recompense or, rest assured, I will see you in court!

Yours litigiously

Peter R. Gordon

Cairngorms estate sold abroad

Glenavon estate, the third largest in the Cairngorms, has been sold for over £6million to an offshore company, apparently from Malaysia. The same person(s) already own land in Inverness-shire. Here the Ramblers Association has expressed concern over what they see as a hostile attitude to walkers, for example through the erection of intimidating notices stating that deer shooting means it is unsafe to stray from paths for long periods of the year. According to the press SNH is to meet the representatives of the new owner of Glenavon to discuss its management. Given the current emphasis on a voluntary partnership approach to management in the Cairngorms it will be interesting to see what happens on Glenavon.

Dotterel *John Chapman*

Cairngorms Partnership

The Secretary of the Cairngorms Partnership has asked us to point out that the Board comprises 22 members in addition to the Chairman. Each of the 9 local authorities currently administering parts of the Cairngorms Partnership Area has a representative and 13 other individuals represent the wide range of interests involved.

REVIEWS

St Kilda - The Continuing Story of the Islands *Edited by Meg Buchanan. 1995. HMSO 108pp £10.95 ISBN 0 11 495172 1.*

This book is a series of essays on St Kilda ranging over its history, the buildings, archaeology, animal and bird life and the future for these most beautiful of islands. It is doubtful if any other small archipelago has received so much attention from the written word over the last few years and the question must be asked, when another book appears, as to whether there is anything more to say. "The Continuing Story" confirms there is. It is a fascinating study bringing together a group of authors, each of whose contributions furthers our understanding and knowledge of St Kilda. This book should find its way on to the bookshelves of all those interested in these islands and will set the standard for future writings on the subject.

Pamela Black

An exhibition "St Kilda Explored" is at the Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove, Glasgow from 20 October 1995 until 25 August 1996.

To Fair Isle and Back: **John Holloway.** *Available from J. Holloway, "Castle", Stronsay, Orkney £9.50 including p&p. Paperback, 112 pp*

One of the greatest pleasures of ornithology is watching rare birds on small islands. This beautifully illustrated book - despite its slightly misleading title - is mainly about migration on the Orkney island of Stronsay. The North Isles of Orkney are a great place to watch birds. There is an excellent observatory on North Ronaldsay. In this book John Holloway describes how he set up a personal reserve designed to attract migrants on another of the North Isles, Stronsay. The story of his success is well illustrated by his own very attractive paintings of a wide range of unusual birds and glimpses of the Orkney landscape. The book is full of the excitement of migration as well as the annual bird life of a small island.

Niall Campbell

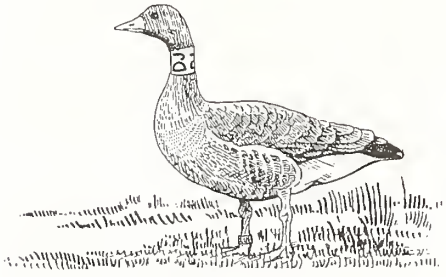
Corrour goes overseas

Despite its positon in the centre of the Highlands this famous area around Loch Ossian is now owned by the heiress to a Swedish packaging company who lives in the USA.

MEMBERS' REQUESTS

Colour marked Greylag Geese

Sightings of Greylags bearing dye marks, darvic rings or neck collars, together with details of colours and letters seen (no matter how incomplete), should be sent to: **Brian Etheridge, "Morven", Station Road, Avoch, Ross-shire, IV9 8RW. Telephone 01381 620098 (home) or 01463 715000 (work).**



Colour ringed Ring Ouzels

A number of birds have been individually colour ringed. Any sightings of colour ringed Ring Ouzels will be greatly appreciated by **David Arthur, 12 Dundee Street, Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7PD. 01241 853356.**

Colour ringed Stonechats

All sightings will be acknowledged by **Andrew Thorpe, 30 Monearn Gardens, Milltimber, Aberdeen AB1 1YP**

Colour ringed Mute Swans - Lothian & Fife

Sightings should be sent to **Allan & Lyndesay Brown, 61 Watt's Gardens, Cupar, Fife, KY15 4UG (Telephone 01334 656804)** from whom further information can be obtained on the study.

Wing tagged Hen Harriers

Details of any sightings however incomplete should be sent to **Brian Etheridge, RSPB North Scotland Office, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW tel 01463 715000** as soon as possible.

Wing tagged Red Kites and Sea Eagles

see pages 3 & 14

SOC NOTICES

200 Club

Winners in the third quarter of 1995 were:

July 1st £30 - A. Duncan, Aberdeen; 2nd £20, Mrs H L Harper, Edinburgh; 3rd £10, J C Maxwell, Hamilton.
August 1st £30, M B Ross, Melrose; 2nd £20, Miss G C Thin, Edinburgh; 3rd £10, Mrs M C Lawrie, Troon.
September 1st £30, Miss D E Smart, Selkirk; 2nd £20, J K R Melrose, Bankfoot; 3rd £10, R R Burn, East Kilbride

For information about the 200 Club write to **Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL (Tel. 01896 822 176)**

New Year Bird Counts

An even to begin the 60th Anniversary celebrations of the founding of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club is to take the form of a New Year Bird Count carried out by as many SOC members as possible.

If you want to take part, please use the form enclosed with this edition of *Scottish Bird News* and follow the instructions. The Count is something that you should do for enjoyment. You could even do one as you take that New Year's Day walk to clear your head! You don't even have to be at home, although anyone holidaying in The Gambia will have an awful job trying to fit all those extra species onto the form. The more people from as many parts of Scotland who participate then the better the Count will be.

All the records will be passed to your local recorder and, if this year's count is a success, it could be repeated. An annual picture of the birds present in Scotland in midwinter could be a very useful source of information for conservation organisations in Scotland.

Once you have completed the count, fill in the form and return it to **David Kelly, c/o Scottish Ornithologists' Club, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh, EH7 5BT**. An article on the count and its results will appear in a future edition of SBN. I look forward to receiving the return of your forms and hope that all of you who take part enjoy yourselves.

Lothian Branch Club Nights

The subject of the talk for the Lothian Branch club night on 28 February 1996 is *Birds of Eastern Arabia* by John Palfrey.

Search for founder members

As it will be the Club's 60th Anniversary in 1996, an attempt is being made to trace founder members. So far it looks as if only 11 names will be on this exclusive list. Please, if you think you are a founder member, or if you know the name of any member who joined the Club in the pre war years 1936-1939, will you get in touch with the Secretary at Regent Terrace as soon as possible? Some lady founder members may have been omitted because they originally joined under their maiden names. So far only one is on the list. Are there any more?

Binding Scottish Birds

Arrangements have been made for Club members to send Volumes 16 & 17 of *Scottish Birds* for binding as a double volume. The 8 parts, 4 Scottish Bird Reports and 2 Indexes should be sent direct to:-
Reilly, Dunn & Wilson, Glasgow Road, Falkirk FK1 4UP Telephone 01324 621591
Standard Red cloth binding £19.05 inc. return postage
Red 1/4 Leather bound £30.47 inc. return postage
Send cheque with order and remember to include your address for return posting.

Donald Watson watercolour

The North Angus Support Group of the SWT is raffling a watercolour by Donald Watson. The painting is dated 1964 and is of Montrose Basin viewed from the north-east corner. It is framed and measures 30'x24'. It features mudflats with waders in the foreground, the town and its distinctive church steeple in the background and a steam train at the station. The painting may be viewed at Montrose Basin Wildlife Centre. Raffle tickets, costing 50pence each, are available there and also from Mr J B Strang (phone 01674 672697) As runner-up prizes there are four signed copies of Donald's "A Bird Artist in Scotland". Proceeds of the raffle will be split between SWT's Charles Connell Fund and the Montrose Basin Wildlife Centre.

Thanks to

Thanks are once again due to the army of volunteers who willingly come into 21 every quarter and stuff envelopes. The stuffers for the September mailing are:- Joan Wilcox, Bob & Betty Smith, Rosemary Davidson, Neville Crowther, Sue Goode and Ian & Catherine Craig.

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THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

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Edited by Sylvia Laing and
Stan da Prato
Assisted by Pamela Black

Conference matters

The annual SOC conference has a longstanding reputation, which extends well beyond Scotland, as one of the friendliest events on the conference circuit. However there have been concerns over the cost and choice of venue. Some members will recall that we once went to Dunblane, then North Berwick, before experimenting with University Halls at different times of year. Recently we returned to North Berwick before moving to Kingussie. To try to gauge members' opinions a small group has just finished analysing questionnaires given to those who attended the Kingussie conference as well as a sample of members who did not

The questionnaire issued to participants at the Kingussie conference resulted in an encouraging 62% response. The questionnaire was a "tick in boxes" exercise, but just over half the returns contained additional comments; some people have no sympathy with survey organisers who like to keep things nice and simple!

The second questionnaire was given out at branch meetings and asked members to indicate, again by ticking boxes, what they would like to see in future conferences. At the time of writing returns from a few branches have not been received but a large enough sample has been obtained. Response to this questionnaire was about 30% of those attending each meeting.

What do the returns tell us?

Firstly the response from Kingussie. All questions asked for ratings under the heading of high, medium and low. High was taken to be an enthusiastic response and given the score of +1, medium non committal (no score), and low a negative response with a score of -1. Not everyone answered each question; no answer was taken as being non committal. The answers against each question were totalled, and expressed as a percentage of the highest possible response if everyone had responded enthusiastically.

The highest praise went to the Saturday morning session, scoring 88%. Other enthusiastic ratings, all above 75% were the friendly atmosphere, the location, helpfulness of SOC staff and helpers, the reception/registration arrangements, and the time of year. 78% said they definitely wanted to come again.

SMITHSONIAN
APR 2 5 1996
LIBRARIES

Red Kite in a Highland glen *Mike Ashley*

Red Kites are breeding again in Scotland but some have already been killed illegally.
For an in depth review of the raptor debate turn to pages 6-9.

In the lukewarm bracket, ranging from 55% down to 40%, were stimulation and overall value for money (55%) whether the conference was good fun, the quality of the Sunday morning session, pre conference information and presentation (all 53%); whether they found the other participants interesting (48%), timekeeping (46%), Friday evening entertainment (42%) and whether the atmosphere was encouraging (40%). The ratings for Friday evening and Sunday morning might have been higher, but several people did not attend these sessions.

In the lukewarm to cool bracket came whether the conference furthered attendees' interest in Scottish ornithology (38%), a lively atmosphere (37%), value for money of the hotel (33%), quality of the food (33%), enough time to meet people (24%), standard of the hotel accommodation (19%), the facilities provided by the hotel for the main events (18%), and the after dinner speeches (5%).

Those items which got an overall negative rating were the facilities provided by the hotel for the sideshow events (-9%), the quality of hotel service (-15%), and the suggestion that the conference might be moved to March (a massive -55%).

The unsolicited comments fell into 4 main headings. Against "talks/projection" we had adverse comments about the size of the screen and the quality of the projection equipment and a request for less talks and more time for questions or discussion. On the administration front, comments related to name tags, congestion round the registration area and at the secondhand book stall.

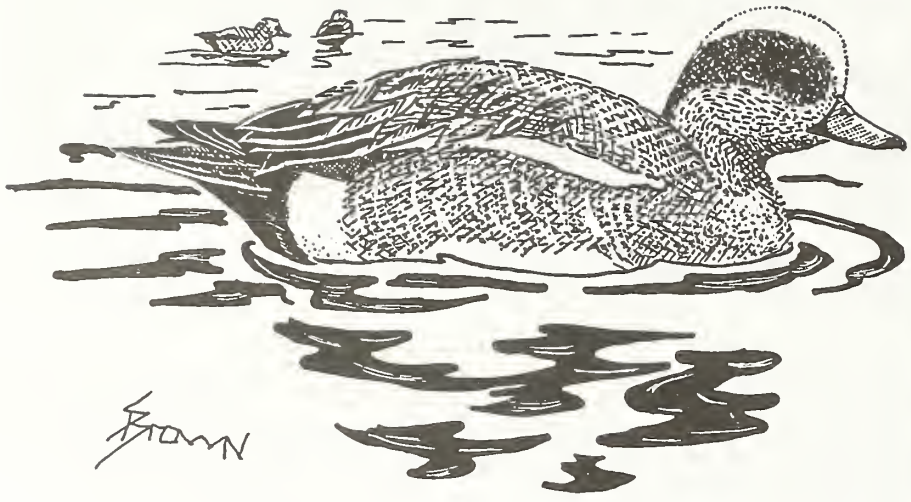
Dinner arrangements came in for some flak. Many deprecated the lack of entertainment afterwards, apart from a disco that appealed to no one. There were also some comments on the hotel management. People find it easier to criticise than to praise and all the above must be read against the fact that 78% wanted to come again and 83% found the atmosphere friendly; it was a highly successful conference. We have, however, obtained very useful pointers which should make the next one much better.

None of the administrative problems are difficult to solve. We have given much consideration as to whether we should move to another venue but it is a fact that all new venues present teething problems and we felt that there were few shortcomings that could not be ironed out by next year if we gave the hotel enough notice and advice. We also recognised that SOC staff are under considerable pressure before and during conferences. We are thus proposing to Council that we go back to the Duke of Gordon Hotel, Kingussie, and that a Conference Organising committee is formed that will help the staff at Regent Terrace meet the criteria for a successful conference.

Second survey

The second survey was targeted at members attending branch meetings, both those who had been to a conference at some time and those who had never been to one. Let us call them the *beens* and the *not beens*. Again, respondents did not answer all questions. It appeared that 'no response' indicated a lack of interest. The answers were again under the heading of high, medium and low. In this case these ratings were awarded 3, 2 and 1 points respectively, and the totals against each question divided by the maximum number of points attainable. The returns from the *beens* and the *not beens* were analysed separately. The 2 groups agreed on many points. More than three quarters of the members would like to see in future conferences firstly, emphasis on Scottish birds, secondly, time for outdoor excursions, closely followed by good fun, then shops for books and art etc., a keynote talk linked to a theme at least for half a day with an output useful to Scottish birds. Agreement between the *beens* and *not beens* was also evident in their desire for an informal friendly atmosphere (92%), and adequate time to meet other birders.

Where they differ was on cost, location and type of accommodation on offer. About a third of each would be happy if the overall cost were to be below £80 but 45% of the beens would accept or prefer if the overall cost was between £100 and £80, whereas 45% of the not beens wanted the overall cost to be below £60. Among the *beens* there was a higher preference than the *not beens* for the North - the Speyside experience - and a greater preference among the not beens for the south. Both sides, however, gave the biggest vote to Central Scotland. Regarding accommodation type, both *beens* and *not beens* felt that there should be a wide range of accommodation on offer to suit all tastes and pockets. As to time of year, two thirds of the beens preferred an autumn (Oct/Nov) conference. However, the *not beens* were equally divided as to an autumn or a March date.



Wigeon *Steven Brown*

Large numbers of Wigeon and other water birds as well as Hen Harriers flying to roost can be seen on Insh Marshes, a popular excursion from Kingussie

Summing up we scored high in about half the categories and fell short in the other half; not bad but could be better.

A fuller report will be considered by Council which must await the outstanding returns and further analysis and thought by the committee. Changes are likely to be recommended, both to provide better fare for established conference goers and to attract new blood from the ranks of the *not beens*, for that way lies the key to success of future conferences and the continued good health of the club.

Meanwhile, if you have any great suggestions for material or entertainment for the next conference, at which we will be celebrating our 60th anniversary, please write to me, c/o Regent Terrace. Even better, if you are willing to help by joining the 1996 Conference Organising committee, please let us know right away. The success of your Club depends on you!

David Merrie

Prejudice bars the return of the wolf

Dr Martyn Gorman, of Aberdeen University, told the Mammal Society Conference recently that the barriers to the reintroduction of the wolf to Scotland were political and social, not environmental. He thinks that the Scottish Highlands could easily support packs of a carnivore which still runs wild in Spain, Italy, Germany and Russia.

Rhum has been suggested as a prime, deer rich habitat but Dr Gorman thinks that Rhum would not be suitable. A pack, which normally has 8 to 10 animals with a dominant breeding pair and other subordinates, needs around 200 square miles of territory and Rhum isn't big enough.

Estimates vary of the number of Wolves needed to sustain a viable population but the population would need to be in the hundreds to ensure survival of the species, meaning landowners would have to accept Wolves wandering over large areas of the country.

Farmers are instinctively hostile to Wolves as there is no doubt they would take sheep. Compensation schemes would have to be worked out before any reintroduction could take place. The suggestion that Wolves could cull the Highlands' Red Deer population is less likely as as one stag a week would be enough to feed a whole pack.

The conference also discussed another extinct Scottish species which may be reintroduced. Professor Michael Usher, chief scientific adviser to Scottish Natural Heritage, is in the early stages of a project with the Beaver, which was hunted for its pelt until it was killed off 2 centuries before the last Wolf. Usher's work has been prompted by the EU's Habitat Directive, which orders member countries to consider reintroducing native species.

The European Beaver has been successfully reintroduced in the Netherlands, France and Sweden. European Beavers do not cause the same problems as their north American relatives whose log dams can lead to flooding.

Dr Gorman has concluded: " The reason why these animals became extinct in the first place was through human persecution and it would be both folly and extreme cruelty to consider reintroducing them without first dealing with that prejudice".

Wolf in the forest

Sinead McCabe

Charles Frank

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Nesting Red-throated Diver *Sidney Clarke*

Why are the Highlands and Islands not a National Park?

I was brought up in the heart of Sheffield but I have lived on Mull now for 17 years. Though we have a small hotel on the island my own vocation is taking people out to see Mull's fascinating wildlife. I have to own up to being in love with Mull and this may well cloud my judgment but isn't the time right for the Highlands and Islands to be declared a National Park?

At present conservation is based on reserves. What is actually wrong with protecting all of it? Despite the efforts of all our conservation bodies there are quite massive holes in the system.

Suppose that a party of wind surfers or water skiers descend on a Scottish sea loch to have fun. There is nothing at present to stop this happening or to cause those people to even think of the damage they can cause to such a fragile situation. It happens already and it always will until people think bigger than they do at present.

Most humans are afraid of making big decisions. As a result, almost everything that we do ends up diluted or fragmented.

Insensitive industrialists and some politicians are perfectly happy to see conservationists all doing their own thing as they are present. Personally I think that it should be a regular thing for the heads of all conservation bodies to sit around a table and talk about 'big ideas'. They should then go hand in hand to the people and the press with those ideas.

I cannot think of a single reason why the Highlands and Islands does not already have National Park status. I assume there must be one somewhere and I would be most interested to hear what it is.

But consider the hundreds of positive reasons for such a thing to be in place. Firstly it would raise the whole profile of the area in a global way. With more international recognition it is inevitable that more people would want to visit the area and the rest of Scotland would benefit because people would clearly have to come through there to get to the Park area. In the Park area one of the great attractions is that most jobs that would be created would be so called 'green' jobs. Tourist centres and information areas would spring up and many of our young people would no longer have to leave the west of Scotland looking for jobs because these places would have computer technology and all manner of communication jobs would be created. Local pride would increase and the Gaelic language (a subject sensitive to many) may well enjoy a renaissance. Existing businesses would benefit.

This is, of course, a very big subject and I for one am big enough for it but I do have my Wildlife Expeditions to run and also my hotel to take care of and there are others better equipped and qualified to take this forward if they want to. I would like every head of every conservation body to discuss this and see what a positive thing it would be for all of us in Scotland. If ever there was a moment in time when we should go for this it is now.

David Woodhouse
Isle of Mull Wildlife Expeditions

The issue of National Park status for several of the most important areas in the Highlands has been an issue for decades and recent issues of SBN have covered it eg in the context of the future of the Cairngorms. We have also given space to Government claims that Scotland does not need National Parks, although most countries in the World, including some of the very poorest, manage to support them. We are not aware of proposals from any conservation body to confer Park status on the whole of the Highlands and do not doubt that it would arouse considerable oppositon from many in the area. We shall be happy to publish any comment from conservation bodies about the extent to which they discuss "Big Ideas". Eds.

Trains, Cranes and Eagles

As I sat aboard a slow train pulling out from the small town on Dombas, I recalled the words of my former ecology tutor: "If you want to see how Scotland used to look, visit the west coast of Norway". My destination was Songli, a Norwegian wildlife research centre to the west of Trondheim. I had been invited over as a research assistant for a week.

Wildlife exploration

First stop was Trondheim's 9 hole golf course with its stunning views out over Trondheimsfjorden. Here, on a small reservoir, lived a family of European Beavers. The Trondheim group has become accustomed to people on the surrounding greens and fairways, and seem little bothered by human presence. Nevertheless, we wandered the shore for some time before one finally appeared; a little brown head just breaking the still water surface came gliding silently up towards us. The beaver edged closer and came ashore amongst a large patch of yellow Marigolds but a dog barked and the beaver was off. Later, a second beaver also appeared. A less gregarious and destructive animal than its North American counterpart, the European Beaver is not a major tree feller and, on average, this family fell just one tree, typically a Willow, Aspen or Birch, per year.

Beware of Elk

Suddenly, we stopped. Feet in front of us, tearing the foliage from the branches, was an Elk. As Elk go, this was a small one, but still as big as a horse and, erring on the side of caution, we edged back. Grasping the base of a branch in its mouth, the Elk would run that branch through its teeth, stripping off the leaves. It worked steadily, pausing occasionally to cast a wary eye. Elk traffic signs are to Norway what sheep signs are to the Scottish Highlands. Indeed, one of the major causes of Norwegian road traffic accidents is from collisions with Elk, and roadside shrubbery is often cleared to reduce the likelihood of Elk stepping unnoticed into the road.

Boreal forest

The following afternoon we went to check our first Golden Eagle site. Songli disappeared behind us as I was introduced to the Boreal forest. Its beauty and richness were to be constant companions during my visit. So this was how Scotland once looked? Scots Pines and Silver Birches blanketed an ice moulded landscape, interspersed with Rowans, Aspens and, in boggy parts, Willows. There was much dead standing timber and still living windthrow. Late lying snow patches glistened in the warm sun and, from where snow had recently melted, fresh green shoots emerged. Most of the forest floor was a deep pile carpet of Blaeberry, Cowberry and Heather with abundant Chickweed Wintergreen, Wood Anemones and Violets. There were forest bogs too, with Bog Cotton and the carnivorous Butterwort and Sundew. As we emerged above the timber line we found the short and twisted *Krummholz* forms of pine and birch. Unfortunately, our Golden Eagle pair were not around the expected site, a scenario with which we were to become increasingly familiar.

Eagle research

The following morning I awoke at 5.00 am to the haunting cry of duetting Cranes. Later that morning, we looked at another empty eagle site, this time a Sea Eagle's. The story was repeated with Golden Eagles in the afternoon. One of the main aspects of the eagle research was to collect and identify prey remains from nests to build up a more complete picture of the diets of both Sea and Golden Eagles in an area where the 2 species co exist in high densities and close proximity. The other important element of the research is concerned with studying competitive interactions of the 2 eagles at winter carrion. In spite of the Sea Eagle's greater size, at winter carrion Golden Eagles were always dominant. An aspect of Sea Eagle ecology that soon struck me concerned their nest sites. All the nests I saw were positioned, as so many Scottish Osprey nests are, on the tops of Scots Pines. Although Sea Eagles will nest on rock ledges, or even steep banks, they do, apparently, prefer tree nest sites.

The poor breeding season may have been related to the late spring in Norway, which certainly adversely affected local farmers. That there were so few active nests was disappointing but, in view of the fact that by the end of the season only 5 of 15 Sea Eagle pairs and 1 of 18 Golden Eagle pairs did breed, I feel lucky to have had the opportunity to ring a Sea Eagle chick.

Dominic Sargent

Crane - this bird was photographed in Scotland but the species still breeds in Scandinavia and could breed again in Scotland if the habitat is restored.

Sam Alexander

Facts about raptors

In our last issue we highlighted the crude attempts by some landowners to remove legal protection from birds of prey. It is symptomatic of the arrogance of some, though by no means all, landowners and keepers that they presume that their views must be right. It is the basis of our case that, however much we as individuals enjoy watching birds, decisions about their conservation should be based on the best scientific information available. By scientific we do not just mean the results of professional studies. Most members of the SOC are not professional scientists but many contribute to science, whether through our own publications, as members of the Scottish Raptor Study Group, as participants in surveys organised by our colleagues at the British Trust for Ornithology or as supporters of the various protection and monitoring schemes organised by the RSPB

Populations of raptors in the UK

In the early part of this century 5 of the 15 species of bird of prey which currently breed in the UK either were or became extinct, largely due to persecution during the 19th century. Others, such as the Red Kite, were on the brink of extinction. Changing attitudes and legislation and the reduction in gamekeeping during the 2 World Wars allowed populations to recover, apart from the Peregrine, which was killed to protect carrier pigeons. After the Second World War, when gamekeepers returned, persecution began again. The recovery of several species was also halted by the use of organochlorine pesticides in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Since the mid 1960s, most species have been recovering. Two species have been reintroduced. One programme has established breeding White-tailed Eagles in Scotland; another has established breeding Red Kites in England and Scotland, the Welsh population of Red Kites having recovered only slowly. The only other raptor reintroduction known is that of Goshawks in an uncoordinated "programme" by falconers. Ospreys recolonised Scotland naturally and protection has assisted a slow recovery in numbers and range. Several species - Peregrine, Sparrowhawk, Merlin and Marsh Harrier - have been slowly expanding back into areas where they died out during the pesticide era. However some, such as the Sparrowhawk and the Hen Harrier, are now declining in parts of their range. Even the Peregrine, which has reached its highest recorded densities in many areas, has not made a full recovery and has declined in the northwest. The Kestrel now appears to be in more widespread decline.

What factors limit the population size of raptors?

The numbers of breeding raptors that any landscape can support are limited by food or nest sites. Raptor numbers will not increase indefinitely but will tend to stabilise at a level determined, usually, by the availability of food. Some UK species have declined in some areas in the last decade because food has declined due to changes in land use. Intensification of arable agriculture in the lowlands and overgrazing and afforestation in the uplands may be why Kestrels have declined on a widespread scale and Sparrowhawks, Peregrines and Golden Eagles have declined in some areas.

However, most raptors are still well below the carrying capacity of even modern landscapes. In Scotland this is mainly because of persecution. Ospreys are still recovering from past persecution and persecution is still preventing, or slowing the recovery of, Hen Harriers, Golden Eagles and Buzzards. Only the Hobby population is genuinely increasing rather than recovering throughout its UK range, though the Peregrine is at highest known levels in several areas.

All this means that 6 species of UK raptor are still rare, with populations of fewer than 300 pairs, and a further 6 are scarce with fewer than 1,300 pairs. Only the Sparrowhawk, Buzzard and Kestrel are common birds in the UK (12,000-52,000 pairs). To put these populations in perspective, there are an estimated quarter of a million pairs of Red Grouse, over 5 million pairs of Blackbirds and c7 million racing pigeons.

Conservation status

The conservation importance of raptors in Britain is reflected in the listing of 11 of the 15 breeding species as Red Data Birds. The UK is of international importance for Peregrines, Sparrowhawks and Kestrels as it holds 13-14% of the total European population west of the Urals of each species. The UK also has 7% of European Golden Eagles, 3% of its Merlins and 1-2% of its Hen Harriers, Buzzards, Ospreys and Hobbies.

Recent evidence of persecution

The RSPB recorded 1,065 incidents, over one third of them in Scotland, in 1994 making it the second worst year on record. The most frequent offences are trapping, shooting and nest destruction, with poisoning and egg collecting not far behind. Half of all the recorded incidents involved birds of prey, and of these 43% were from

Confirmed bird of prey persecution incidents in the UK: 1979-1989

Species	Poisoned	Shot	Nests	Total birds
Buzzard	228	139	-	367
Hen Harrier	6	51	98	155
Peregrine	10	55	24	89
Kestrel	28	40	2	70
Sparrowhawk	12	38	-	50
Golden Eagle	27	13	7	47
Goshawk	1	38	7	46
Red Kite	24	-	-	24
Hobby	-	9	-	9
Marsh Harrier	4	3	-	7
Merlin	-	4	3	7
Osprey	-	4	-	4
White-tailed eagle	1	2	-	3
Total no. of birds	345	398	141	743
No. of incidents	277	301	145	679

Source: RSPB/NCC

Male Hen Harrier in Caithness *Mike Ashley*

Scotland. The number of offences against birds such as Hen Harriers, Golden Eagles and Peregrines exceeds 2,500 for the period 1987 to 1994.

Which methods are used to kill raptors?

Poisoning and trapping are indiscriminate, often targeted at legal "pest" species, such as Crows and foxes, though raptors also become victims. However, in many cases, raptors are undoubtedly the target. Shooting and the destruction of nest contents are obviously intended to destroy the raptors affected.

Analysis of reported incidents in Scotland in 1994 showed that the main methods used to destroy birds of prey illegally are nest destruction, shooting and poisoning. Trapping, using Crow cage traps also occurs, but less commonly than the other 3 methods. Intensive RSPB investigations in 1995 suggest that pole trapping is more common than was previously thought.

Carrion feeding species such as Red Kite, Buzzard and Golden Eagle are particularly vulnerable to poisoned bait. By contrast, poisoning has accounted for only about a quarter of the incidents involving Kestrel, Sparrowhawk, Goshawk and Peregrine. These species, and especially the Hen Harrier, with only 8% of incidents involving poisoning, tend to be targeted more directly.

In Scotland, since the peak in 1989, there has been an apparent decline in the number of reported poisoning incidents. This could reflect the influence of the Government Campaign against Illegal Poisoning of Wildlife and the introduction of the Larsen trap. However, since 1985, there has been a steady increase in the number of reported incidents of shooting, trapping and nest destruction to a peak of 118 in 1994.

Who is doing the killing?

In a large proportion of confirmed cases of illegal persecution of raptors, game management is implicated although evidence is often insufficient for prosecution. Many of the incidents take place on or near areas where game management, usually for grouse or pheasants, is practised. Some incidents involve the taking of eggs or birds from the wild for falconry, taxidermy or collections. Gamekeepers may sometimes encourage such illegal activity in their areas. In 1994, in incidents of shooting, trapping or nest destruction, the suspects named by informants were gamekeepers in three quarters of the 118 reported in Scotland. All 4 Golden Eagle incidents and all but one of the 31 reported Hen Harrier incidents in Scotland in 1994 were centred on areas of managed grouse moor. Persecution is not limited to game areas. For example, there have been a number of prosecutions of pigeon fanciers for raptor persecution, though more so in England and Wales than in Scotland.

These data represent only the tip of the iceberg, comprising cases where corpses of illegally persecuted birds are found and reported. Many cases are not discovered because they happen in secret in remote areas with limited public access.

The impact of persecution on raptor populations

Evidence from studies of Buzzards and Hen Harriers puts illegal persecution into context. The population size and distribution of the Buzzard are now recovering in Scotland for no apparent reason other than a lessening of persecution. The Hen Harrier population recovered quickly after World War 2 but that recovery has now halted and may even have gone into reverse.

Buzzards are currently the raptor most often found illegally killed. Being carrion feeders they are particularly susceptible to the poison baits. The Buzzard is still missing from more than half its previous UK range, especially in the lowlands. In the uplands, there are also large gaps in range, many of which coincide with grouse moors. Although persecution of Buzzards continues, it is probably reducing. There is a growing realisation by keepers and shepherds that Buzzards are not a serious problem, and may even be beneficial as they eat Rabbits, nestling corvids and pigeons.

While there is much suitable habitat which

Buzzards have not yet colonised, they should return to breed across the UK even though recovery will be slow and probably not complete until the middle of next century. Any weakening of legal protection could soon lead to decline in species such as the Buzzard which can be quickly exterminated from large parts of their range.

Hen Harriers

Why has the Hen Harrier not spread from its current range in Scotland to recolonise more of the English uplands and Wales? Why is it still such a scarce bird despite having a higher reproductive rate, earlier age of first breeding and greater natural dispersal ability than the Buzzard.?

This species has always been the raptor most disliked by upland gamekeepers because it will kill grouse and is alleged to disrupt shoots. Hen Harriers are easy to persecute; their nests are relatively easy to find; the eggs and chicks are readily destroyed; on the ground; the females tend to sit fairly tightly on the nest and both sexes will mob human intruders so that it is easy to kill them with a shotgun.

Hen Harrier nesting success is lower on grouse moors than other habitats. An analysis by RSPB researchers of almost 1,000 nesting attempts over 6 years found 23% of pairs on grouse moors raised young compared to 72% on other heather moors and 55% in plantations. In the absence of persecution, Hen Harriers breed very successfully on grouse moors.

During 1988 and 1989, an estimated 3-7% of the Scottish mainland population of adult Hen Harriers were deliberately killed each summer; all but one of the 74 recorded incidents were on grouse moors. The rapid population expansion around the 1940s showed that, without persecution, Hen Harriers can move large distances and rapidly colonise new habitats, such as young forestry plantations. Illegal persecution on grouse moors appears to be the main factor limiting the numbers and distribution of Hen Harriers in Britain. The species could probably recover its lost range in northern England and eastern Scotland within a few decades if left unmolested.

Golden Eagles

Persecution may still be depressing the recovery of the Golden Eagle. A study in the Scottish Highlands between 1944 and 1980 found breeding success on deer forest was 5 times higher than on grouse moors; 58-75% of Golden Eagle clutches failed through persecution, mainly by gamekeepers, compared with 15% failing due to egg robbing and disturbance on deer forest. Most vacant ranges were on grouse moors and the number of pairs on grouse moors showed a big decline. The results of the 1992 survey show an apparently stable population at a time when other raptors are increasing, masking serious declines in some areas balanced by increases in others.

Raptors and Red Grouse

If raptors are suffering on grouse moors are the grouse suffering from the raptors? Many moor managers are finding it more difficult to produce autumn densities of grouse which are high enough for a driven shoot. Some grouse moor interests blame declines in grouse bags on increasing numbers of birds of prey. Raptors appear to be the most obvious cause of grouse mortality and it is not uncommon to find the

Red Grouse *RSPB*

remains of dead grouse chicks in harrier nests and, as they are visible, it is easy to destroy Hen Harriers and their nests.

In most studies of Hen Harriers, the main prey in summer is small birds, such as pipits and larks, with voles probably more important in early and late summer. A range of studies have found grouse forming 0-40% of Hen Harrier diet during the breeding season. In the major grouse areas of the eastern Highlands, Red Grouse average about 40% by weight of all prey taken by Peregrines during the breeding season. It has been estimated that Peregrines could account for up to 5.3% of the grouse population annually on moors. The really important question is whether this means that birds of prey have an affect on numbers of grouse. The answer to this question is being sought by the Joint Raptor Study or "Langholm Project". This 5 year study began in 1992 and is being undertaken by ITE and the Game Conservancy Trust with joint funding from the Buccleuch Estates, SNH, JNCC and RSPB. The objective is to find ways in which raptors and grouse can coexist on grouse moors and so enhance the value of the uplands for wildlife in general. The study reports in March 1997 and all parties have agreed not to speak prematurely about the results. However, raptor predation is highly unlikely to be the cause of long term declines in grouse. Grouse declines have been marked in periods when raptor numbers low. Red Grouse populations in many parts of Britain have been declining for several decades. The declines in grouse in the early part of the century coincided with the all time low points of the populations of many of Britain's raptors.

Why are grouse stocks declining?

Unlike raptor predation there are several factors which are known to have a substantial effect on grouse populations, and are much more likely to be the cause of long term declines. Organisations whose work is dedicated to grouse and moorland management and conservation attribute the decline of grouse to a range of factors. The Game Conservancy is quoted as saying that the main reasons for grouse decline are loss and deterioration of heather moorland from overgrazing, poor burning and afforestation, deaths caused by the diseases louping ill and strongylosis and predation by foxes and crows, which have increased substantially over the last 40 years.

Raptors and songbirds

Many people have commented on a decline in the numbers of some songbirds. At the same time they see an increase in birds of prey, especially Sparrowhawks. People are now more likely to see Sparrowhawk predation in their gardens. This predation is completely natural but some people find it upsetting. Some shooting interests have claimed that this is another example of the need to 'control' raptors.

Sparrowhawks feed almost exclusively on small and medium sized birds. However, Sparrowhawks take some species more than others because of their behaviour. Species such as Willow Warblers, Great Tits and Robins tend to be particularly vulnerable to Sparrowhawks. The songbirds most in decline are mostly those which are not particularly vulnerable to Sparrowhawks, such as Spotted Flycatchers and Corn Buntings.

Wytham Woods, near Oxford, have seen some of the most detailed studies of songbirds, notably Great Tits, in the world. Adult Great Tits were killed by Sparrowhawks in the breeding season but the overall effect of this on the population was negligible. Even though

Sparrowhawks took up to a third of recently fledged Great Tits, more than 6 young were raised per pair, leaving the population level in autumn much higher than that of the previous spring. Only about one chick per pair is normally needed to replace the losses of breeding adults and so maintain a stable population.

The elimination of Sparrowhawks from large areas of the UK around 1960 due to pesticides provided an unintentional experiment; no large increase in songbirds resulted. Studies at Wytham showed that, during this period when Sparrowhawks were absent, the number of breeding tits was at about the same level as at present, when losses to Sparrowhawks are high. Fluctuations in the Great Tit breeding population seem to be regulated by winter food supply, not predation levels.

Why are some songbirds declining?

Most of the songbird species which have been declining during the 20 years of the Sparrowhawk's recovery are typical of lowland farmland. While evidence that Sparrowhawks are the cause of songbird declines is lacking, the impact of agricultural intensification during the period of songbird declines is well documented. The intensification of agricultural practices results from EU and UK agricultural policies aimed at increasing food production.

Raptors and domestic pigeons

Pigeon fanciers claim that Peregrines and Sparrowhawks attack pigeons outside their lofts. They say that some Sparrowhawks will enter lofts and take pigeons. Concerns seem to be especially great where repeated losses are suffered from particular lofts within Sparrowhawk and Peregrine territories. Certain breeds of pigeon, such as Tumblers, provide such easy prey that in some areas keeping them is said to be unviable. The alleged losses of domestic pigeons seem most severe in south west England, the Glamorgan valleys and Cumbria where the densities of Peregrines and fanciers are both high. Pigeon fanciers have been seeking legalised control of raptors since 1925. Indeed, it was their calls for raptor control in the 1950s which prompted the BTO survey that discovered the extent of the massive decline in Peregrines due to pesticides.

There is no doubt that certain raptor species kill domestic pigeons. Wild pigeons form part of the natural diet of Peregrines, Sparrowhawks and Goshawks, although other raptor species in the UK rarely kill pigeons. Pigeons are the primary prey of Peregrines in Britain largely because they are readily available. Peregrines could account for as much as 3% of the national racing pigeon population annually. Feral pigeons form less that 5% of the diet of Sparrowhawks. Usually only female Sparrowhawks take pigeons because, being larger than the males, only they are big enough to catch them. It has been suggested that in some areas the increase in racing pigeons has enabled the Peregrine population to increase to new levels.

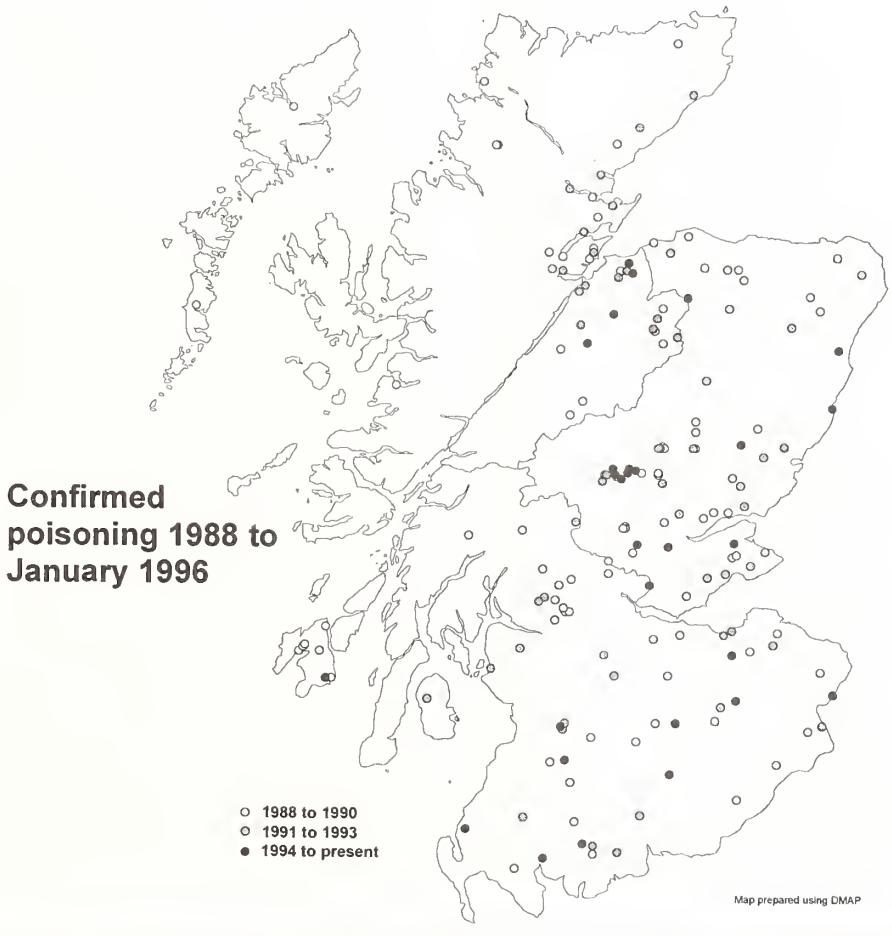
There are many other factors which result in the loss of pigeons. Birds often get lost or die, especially in poor weather. Most of us will have experienced the disinterest of pigeon fanciers when offered birds picked up by the public. They really only want the winners back. If so, one wonders why the loss of a few percent worries them so much unless it is the human failing of blaming easy targets, such as Peregrines, which cannot answer back.

The benefits of raptors

The presence of raptors can create significant benefits to local economies through attracting tourists to rural areas. The associated spending creates and supports jobs in accommodation, catering, retailing and other trades, as well as in wildlife interpretation and wardening. For example, expenditure by visitors to the RSPB's Loch Garten reserve, the main attraction of which is the nesting Ospreys, was estimated at £580,000 in 1988 while 60,000 people visit the Peregrine watch point at Symonds Yat, Gloucestershire each year. More generally, wildlife is seen by very large numbers of walkers and other tourists as a major plus in attracting them into the outdoors.

This longer than average article is really a very short summary of a report Birds of Prey in the UK presented to the DOE/ JNCC Raptor Working Group. It has been produced jointly by the BTO, Hawk & Owl Trust, National Trust, RSPB, Scottish and Welsh Raptor Groups and the Wildlife Trusts and endorsed by the SOC as well as WWF-UK, NTS and WWT in response to recent demands for a reduction in the protection afforded to birds of prey. The 70 page report, with its many detailed references which we cannot list here, is essential reading for anyone seriously interested in these issues and a tribute to the work of hundreds of dedicated ornithologists. A copy is in the Waterston Library.

Stan da Prato
Sylvia Laing



Power cable casualties within the Clyde Valley

The study, which has been brought to the attention of Scottish Power and several national conservation agencies, lies in the Clyde Valley, dividing two important wetland sites: Barons Haugh RSPB Reserve and Merryton. Since 1990, annual reports have highlighted the site's ornithological importance. In particular, flocks of Whooper and Mute Swans are abundant in this area each winter. Monitoring has shown that some bird species are particularly vulnerable to striking overhead cables.

Throughout the monitoring process, Scottish Power has viewed this issue with great concern and whilst, as yet, no ultimate solution has been identified, steps have been taken to increase the diameter of the earth wire by attaching a wrap on fibre optic cable. This work was completed by June 1993. The effective diameter of the wire becomes 31mm (from 19mm) which should be more visible to birds. The site requires to be monitored for several years now to ascertain whether the earth wire is an effective method of reducing casualties.

Fewer swan casualties occurred during the 1994-95 winter. However, contributory factors to this included: flooding (preventing site inspection), refraining from visiting the site to avoid disturbance to all wildfowl and irregular visits by myself due to a change in circumstances. It is, therefore, too early to conclude that the larger cable definitely has reduced the problem. Should the problem still exist, it is hoped that Scottish Power will continue to remain sympathetic to this sensitive site and will endeavour to identify an ultimate solution.

In the meantime it is appropriate to acknowledge the concern, understanding and co-operation of Scottish Power officials.

Iain English

Species	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Grand Total
Cormorant	1	-	2	-	-	-	3
Grey Heron	-	2	1	1	-	-	4
Mute Swan	7	2	1	1	5	-	16
Whooper Swan	5	4	5	4	1	(1)	20
Swan sp.*	4	4	4	-	4	-	16
Wigeon	-	8	7	5	2	(2)	24
Teal	3	6	11	2	1	(1)	24
Mallard	4	2	11	1	5	(1)	24
Pochard	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Tufted Duck	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Goldeneye	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Duck sp.*	-	5	5	2	-	-	12
Shoveler	-	-	-	-	-	(1)	1
Goosander	1	-	1	-	-	-	2
Coot	1	1	-	1	1	-	4
Lapwing	-	-	4	-	1	-	5
Common Snipe	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Curlew	1	1	2	1	-	-	5
Black-headed Gull	2	2	4	3	-	-	11
LBB Gull	2	2	1	1	1	(1)	8
Herring Gull	1	2	1	-	-	-	4
Gull sp.*	-	2	4	1	-	-	7
Woodpigeon	1	1	-	-	-	(1)	3
Feral Pigeon	-	1	1	-	-	-	2
Pigeon sp.*	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Blackbird	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Song Thrush	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Redwing	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Rook	1	-	-	-	-	(1)	2
Carrion Crow	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
	37	46	67	26	21	(9)	206

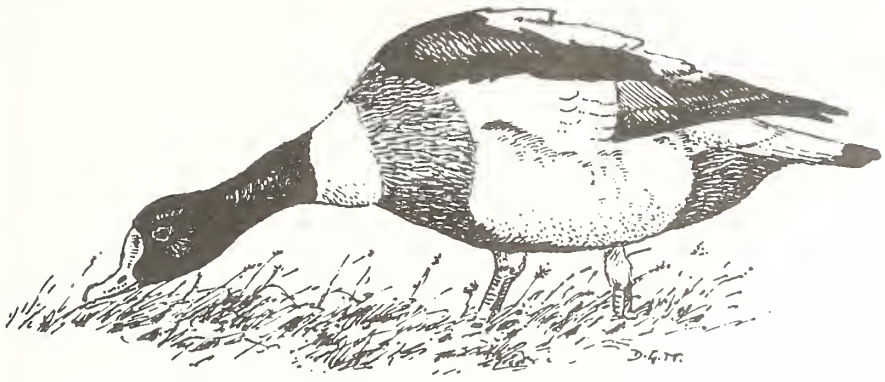
() - figures to 31 Aug 1995

* denotes unidentifiable remains

Whooper Swan *Stan da Prato*

Ythan problems continue

The Scottish Office minister responsible for agriculture has turned down a recommendation that the Ythan estuary, famous for its ecological studies by Aberdeen University into its birds and other wildlife, be declared a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (see SBN 38). Local farmers had successfully lobbied to prevent designation as this would have given the authorities power to reduce run off from fields which all the evidence suggests is the cause of the problem.



Shelduck *David Mitchell*

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Birdwatching in the Outer Hebrides.....
Cunningham, Dix & Snow £6.95

Available from SOC or direct from Saker Press, Carnduncan, Bridgend, Islay, PA44 7PS. *(please add £1 p&p).*

Porpoises threatened by gill nets

The Harbour Porpoise is one of 116 endangered species which Britain intends to conserve as part of its Biodiversity Action Plan. Porpoises have virtually disappeared from much of the North Sea and the English Channel. They are still relatively common off the west of Scotland especially in sea areas such as the Minches.

The Scottish ban on monofilament gill nets with a mesh size of more than 250mm was introduced in the 1980s to prevent salmon poaching. Fishermen's organisations have pressed for monofilament to be allowed again since the nets are an extremely effective and cheap way of catching fish. However they are also likely to catch much larger creatures with disastrous results. Danish researchers think that 7,000 porpoises are killed each year by monofilament gill nets in the North Sea.

Multi strand monofilament nets, permitted at present, are also blamed for the deaths of numbers of seabirds, seals and dolphins. They are more labour intensive as they become entangled more easily and have to be hauled in heavy swells. Single strand monofilament slices through weed, rides out storms and also, because it is cheap, is far more likely to be used.

Raymond Robertson, the Scottish Office Minister, who proposed the lifting of the ban said it would benefit sea fishermen "particularly on the west coast". Scotland's west coast - especially the Minches and the waters around the Hebrides - is known as one of the few places where Harbour Porpoises are regularly seen in any numbers.

Waterbirds and recreation

The spring 1996 conference of the BOU will be organised jointly with the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust. The conference will be at the **University of Bristol** from **19-21 April 1996.** This conference considers the values of wetlands for waterbirds and for people, focusing particularly on the issues surrounding the use of wetlands for recreation. Offers of posters and papers should include abstracts of not more than 400 words and should be sent to: **Dr. Jeff Kirby, The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge, Gloucester (Tel 1453 890333).** Booking forms and further details are available from **Louisa Beveridge** at the same address.

Bicknell's Thrush

The BOU Records Committee has recently accepted the split on taxonomic grounds of the Grey-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus* into 2 species: a restricted Grey-cheeked Thrush comprising the races *minimus* and *aliciae*, and the monotypic Bicknell's Thrush *C. bicknelli*. *Aliciae* and *minimus* are both larger than *bicknelli*, but measurements overlap. The plumage of *aliciae* is colder and greyer than the generally warmer and more rufous *minimus*. In this respect, *minimus* approaches *bicknelli*. British records of "Grey-cheeked Thrush" have been reviewed, particularly those individuals which died or were trapped. The only previously accepted record of *bicknelli*, from Bardsey in 1961, is no longer considered to be acceptable and the form has been deleted from the British and Irish list.

Recycling paper could threaten forests

The campaign to recycle waste paper may be going too far according to Dr Lindhurst Collins from Edinburgh University. Dr Collins told he Geographers' Conference in Glasgow "The pulp and paper industry is one of the major planters of new forests. if we keep on recycling more and more material, there will be less intensive forest management. If we go for a system where we recycled as much paper in Europe as we possibly could that could mean a 25% reduction in forest cover. Trees are needed to take carbon dioxide from the atmosphere to counteract global warming.

Dr Collins said that if the world's population doubled by 2030 as expected, another 500 million hectares of trees would be needed to fight the greenhouse effect. Dr Collins admitted his views were unlikely to win favour either from the pulp and paper industry, which has spent millions building recycling plants for from environmentalists but agrees that we need more scientific evidence before we continue passing more legislation for recycling targets.

Dr Collins has spent the past 2 years helping to decide which paper products are environmentally sound enough to receive the European stamp of approval. Recently it was announced that recycled content would not be relevant to deciding which fine papers should receive the Green Euro label.

Friends of the Earth disagree with Dr Collins and point out that the pulp and paper industry tends to plant monoculture forests of the type seen in many areas of Scotland, leading to loss of wildlife habitat. Friends of the Earth argue it is always better to recycle. Recycling saves energy, reduces pollution and waste, and cuts back on paper being dumped in landfill sites.

Will a railway be built on Cairn Gorm?

A planning application for a funicular railway and major expansion of visitor facilities near the summit of the mountain is being considered by Highland Regional Council. Cairn Gorm, and the plateau between it and Ben MacDui, provide nesting and feeding grounds for a number of rare birds, such as Dotterel. This is one of the 3 most important mountain areas in Britain for Dotterel, and has been nominated as a Special Protection Area under the European Directive on the Conservation of Birds.

The plateau is part of the RSPB's Abernethy Nature Reserve. One of the greatest threats to this area is erosion by walkers. The summit of Cairn Gorm and the plateau have already suffered damage through thousands of people being attracted by the easy access afforded by the existing chairlift.

The new proposals will increase visitor numbers 4 or 5 fold which could clearly greatly increase the level of damage. The company who operate the present chairlift has tried to answer environmental concerns by proposing to strictly control the visitors; apparently only ranger led groups would be allowed to go onto the plateau from the new visitor centre. This in turn has upset mountaineers who resent any restriction on their freedom to roam. In practice it is difficult to see how these draconian measures could be enforced. That is why conservationists believe a more appropriate solution would be to encourage development at a lower altitude. In this way, visitors would still be able to enjoy a mountain experience and bring economic benefits to the local area, without harming the fragile plateau vegetation.

SOC members may wish to express their views to The Secretary of State for Scotland at St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh. The planning application seems certain to go to The Secretary of State because it raises issues of national importance, for which he is responsible under European law. Also the board of SNH has not withdrawn its objection despite considerable pressure from local politicians keen to stress the need for more jobs in Speyside. SNH say that they require more safeguards; they seem keen to reach some sort of compromise over the development. However there are increasing doubts as to whether this isthe best way to spend £13 million of public money.

Dotterel *Dennis Coutts*

Royal refusal

A legal loophole may prevent important nature conservation sites in Scotland belonging to the Queen from receiving new statutory protection. The areas cover nearly 6,000 hectares of the Queen's Balmoral estate. The mountain plateau of Lochnagar and the forest of Ballochbuie easily qualify for nomination as Special Protection Areas for protecting rare birds or Special Areas for Conservation to protect vulnerable habitats as designated by the European Union. Both sites lost their SSSI designations 15 years ago when the Wildlife and Countryside Act was introduced. At the time the Queen's lawyers successfully argued that the new act could not cover land owned by the Crown. They do not appear on the list of 108 Scottish locations which the Government wants to receive EU protection.

We understand Dr Adam Watson aims to raise the Balmoral situation with the Cairngorm Partnership on whose board he sits, the Scottish Office and SNH.

We also understand that SNH are considering the legal position of Crown land and may prepare a case to put to the Scottish Office for including Crown lands as conservation sites.

Two organisations calling for the inclusion of the Balmoral lands are the RSPB, of which the Queen is patron, and the WWF, of which the Duke of Edinburgh is international president.

Access strategy agreed

A historic gathering has adopted the "access concordat" which, it is hoped will ease tensions in parts of Scotland where, some landowners' practice of posting exclusion signs has angered walkers and climbers. The concordat, the wording of which took 8 drafts before being approved, is the work of the Access Forum, a body representing organisations as diverse as the Ramblers' Association, the National Farmers' Union, the Scottish Landowners' Federation and the Mountaineering Council of Scotland.

The new concordat accepts that people should have freedom of access to the hills, but says that this freedom should be "exercised with responsibility and subject to reasonable constraints for management and conservation purposes".

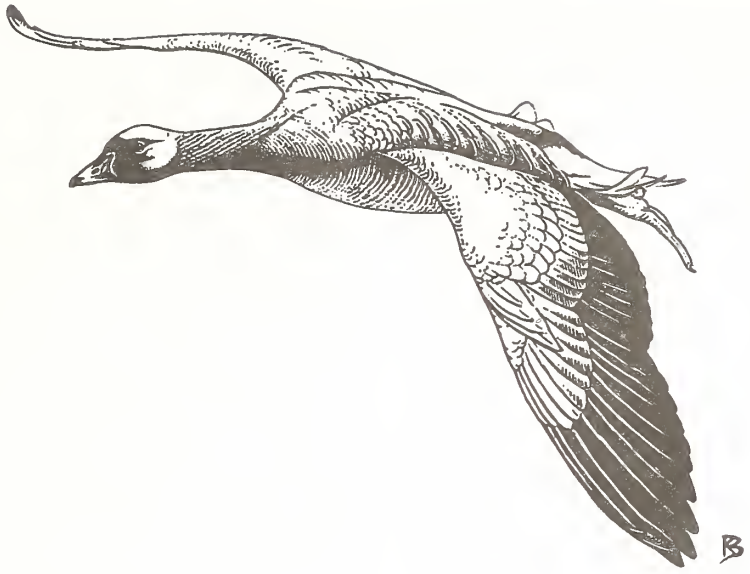
Landowners have reserved the right to ask that walkers do not enter certain areas during stalking, lambing or grouse shooting seasons, a combination which can cover much of the calendar year.

At the launch of the concordat at SNH's Perth headquarters, chairman Magnus Magnusson announced that the Scottish Tourist Board had joined the Forum. The reason given by the board's chief executive was that 44% of visitors to Scotland in 1994 had taken part in hill walking or rambling as part of their holiday; only 3% had played golf!

Scenes from SCENES

This monthly publication, designed as an independant digest of Scottish environmental issues, was launched in 1988. It is based on published material and avoids editorial comment. The SOC Library now has a reciprocal arrangement whereby *Scottish Bird News* is exchanged for *SCENES*. We find it a most useful publication and reprint a small selection of relevant items from the November 1995 issue to give members a flavour of how it operates.

Anyone wanting a speciment copy and subscription details should write, phone or fax to **Michael & Sue Scott, Editors *SCENES*, Strome House, North Strome, Lochcarron, Ross-shire IV54 8YJ. (tel: 01520 722588; fax: 01520 722660).**



Pink-footed Goose *Keith Brockie*

Pine Marten concerns

According to *The Field,* a survey by SNH has confirmed that Pine Martens are continuing to spread southwards. The magazine quoted the concern of Ronnie Rose, Borders wildlife manager for forestry company Booker Countryside "Pine Martens should live in an established forest where there is a natural surplus of food. The idea that we can have them without a Caledonian forest is ridiculous ... We really should be telling the public the truth ... Pine Martens are a major predator. They prefer an egg to anything, are climbing into barns and doing away with Short-eared Owls (sic) and taking Tufted Ducks from nest boxes."

Orkney goose management

The Orcadian reported that all 16 farmers participating in the South Walls Barnacle Goose management scheme on Orkney have agreed to support the scheme for a second year. Work has begun to restore 55 hectares of the best goose grazing areas, with 11.5 hectares reseeded and another 9 hectares direct drilled and fertilised. Farmers allow the geese to graze undisturbed on this refuge area, while a "goose scarer" drives them off other land. Meanwhile, the *Press & Journal* reported that SNH is seeking an experienced naturalist to count goose droppings as a way of monitoring usage by the geese and assessing how successful the refuge areas have been in attracting the birds. Up to 1,200 Barnacle Geese spend the winter on South Walls.

Tay goose slaughter

The *Dundee Courier* reported claims that parties of foreign sportsmen in Fife and Tayside were openly breaking British gun laws and turning shooting parties "into little more than the mass shooting of wildfowl". An anonymous informant told the paper that some foreigners were flouting British gun laws, with little fear of prosecution: "It's mostly the Italian boys. Many of them have guns capable of firing up to 8 or 10 shots. That's illegal in this country. You get 8 of these boys in a small hide and all you need is a single skein of geese coming over. They put so much lead in the air that they are falling all over the place. A lot of them don't even bother to pick up the wounded birds. It's just a slaughter."

Solway goose licence

The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust has expressed concern that the Scottish Office Agriculture Department has again granted a licence to Daniel Quinn, the tenant of the WWT owned Powhillon farm on the Solway, to shoot internationally protected Barnacle Geese on the farm. The licence was granted despite the fact that farmers in the area have the opportunity to join SNH's goose management scheme which offers substantial payments to allow farmers and geese to coexist. WWT commented "We have been in contact with the department through the summer to try to persuade them to refuse the application, since we consider a licence to be indefensible on scientific grounds, but to no avail".

Record poisoning fine

James Lambie, who works on the Farleyer Estate near Aberfeldy in Perthshire, was fined £2,500 in Perth Sheriff Court after he admitted setting out hens' eggs containing the poison alphachloralose on the open ground between 1 May and 6 June 1995. Sheriff John Wheatley said that Mr Lambie had acted with recklessness in an area which was home to Golden Eagles and other birds of prey. Mr Lambie also admitted keeping Mevinphos, a banned pesticide, in a sauce bottle in an unlocked Land Rover.

Lambie's lawyers said that the eggs had been set out "for the purpose of controlling Crows which were liable to take grouse eggs to the prejudice of the shooting on the estate". The Mevinphos had been obtained when it was still an approved pesticide and had been transferred to the sauce bottle from a leaking container.

However, the linked case against landowner Robert Price had to be abandoned because a vital document had not been served on Price in time. James Lambie worked for Price on the Bolfracks estate near Aberfeldy before he moved to neighbouring Farleyer in May. Price had been charged with knowingly causing or permitting Lambie to use alphachloralose for the purpose of killing birds, under a recent amendment to the Wildlife & Countryside Act which extends responsibility for wildlife crime from employees to their employers.

REVIEWS

Tits, Nuthatches & Treecreepers *by Simon Harrap & David Quinn. 1995. Christopher Helm, A&C Black, London. 264 pp. £27:99 hardback. ISBN 0-7136-3944-4.*

110 species from the 4 families of the nuthatches, treecreepers, tits and long-tailed tits are dealt with in the now familiar manner. A section of David Quinn's evocative illustrations, supplemented by coloured maps, is followed by detailed descriptions of every species and many subspecies. As a result of the huge number of subspecies, the very close relationships between certain species and the many cases where the precise relationships between populations are obscure, Simon Harrap has, of necessity, provided readers with one of the best introductions into the nature of species and subspecies that I have encountered. Most species have a section of 'relationships' within the species account which takes full advantage of the latest findings from DNA scientists and field workers. The text is liberally sprinkled with more detailed maps, line drawings and a number of well-chosen sonagrams. The 1,200+ reference bibliography gives some idea of the trouble taken to bring the reader the most up to date information.

Ray Murray

The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Northumbria *compiled and edited by John Day, Mike Hodgson & Nick Rossiter. 1995. Available from John Day, 2 Grange Avenue, Benton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE12 9PN. 308pp. £28:50 including p&p, hardback.*

This tetrad atlas of an area contiguous with Scotland is of great interest to birders on our side of the border. It covers a large area, equivalent to over 50 10km squares, containing 1,410 tetrads. 149 species bred during the 1988-1991 period. Interesting innovations in methodology include timed visits and an actual count of breeding pairs encountered during the survey. The counts have provided a baseline for population estimates in the area. The A4 sized maps are very clear, and have inset 10-km square maps to compare the present survey with that done for the BTO in 1968-72. The species texts, slightly on the brief side, are informative and concentrate on the local history of the species, current distribution and an estimate of the local population. Some estimates seem to be rather on the conservative side but are always interesting as they stimulate questions about our own populations.

Ray Murray

A Photographic Guide to North American Raptors. B K Wheeler and W S Clark*. 1995. Academic Press; London and San Diego. 198pp. £20.00 ISBN 0-12-745530-2*

In under 200 pages there are 377 superb colour plates of all 42 species of North America's diurnal raptors. Each species is illustrated with a series of photographs selected to demonstrate the variations in age, sex, race and colour morphs. For the Red-tailed Hawk alone, perhaps the most confusing yet the most common species, there are 46 individual photographs. Apart from the colour plates there are short sections of text where the birds are described and the races and colour morphs discussed. Following each descriptive text, there is a list of similar species which might be confused; diagnostic field marks are then described. The last section of the book discusses 14 of the most difficult raptor identification problems. The authors are obvious experts in raptor identification, as well as great communicators. The photographs are technically superb. This book is highly recommended for anyone who plans to look at birds of prey in North America.

Ian Poxton

Bird Identification: A Reference Guide *by Kristian Adolfsson and Stefan Cherrug. A supplement to Anser, distributed by the Skanes Ornithogiska Forening, Sweden, 379 pages. ISBN 91-86572-24-5.*

This is a reference book in the true sense of the term, with 16 pages of introduction and a further 343 pages of references. But don't let that put you off, as this is the key to a world wide library of articles on the identification of birds that have occurred in the Western Palearctic and Arabia. The authors have painstakingly sifted through 66 journals. The book is also a valuable source of information on plumage variations, hybrids and subspecies eg leucistic or partially albino Swifts, hybrid Azure x Blue Tits, and many (far) more obscure topics. You need an extensive library in which to find the paper you now know exists and can't wait to read. The SOC's Waterston Library is as good a place as any to start. A practical problem for many potential users is that the reference titles are given (not surprisingly) only in their original language. If your interests extend to computers, the promise of an updated computerised version in 1997 may lead you to think twice about buying this paper version!

Ian Andrews

Handbook of the Birds of the World Volume 2: New World Vultures to Guineafowl *edited by Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliot and Jordi Sargatal available from Lyncx Edicions, Passeig de Gracia, 12, 08007 Barcelona*

This mammoth 604 page book covers all the world's raptors (*Falconiformes*) and gamebirds (*Galliformes*). It is a pleasure to browse, with some wonderful colour photographs (302 in all), some depicting unusual behaviour or angles, and covering a wide variety of species. The 60 colour plates cover all the species within the two orders included in this book. It is unfortunate that there are no flight illustrations for the birds of prey. The introductory chapters on each family of birds covered are readable and informative; the species accounts are for reference but information is easily accessed, and appears to be accurate and up to date.

Mark Holling

Annual Review of the World Pheasant Association, *1993-94 (Ed) D Jenkins. WPA PO Box 5, Lower Basildon, Reading. 1995 ISBN 0-906864-15-1*

This volume marks a change in publishing policy by the Association from a journal to an annual review which concentrates on relatively short articles with some abstracts from longer papers. This one runs to 124 pages plus some advertisements. The attraction of Pheasants to the better off sections in society is apparent in the ads for Bollinger champagne The Review is attractively illustrated and produced; the colour plates of a male Capercaillie is just the sort of thing we would print in this magazine if we had the money!

Stan da Prato

Atlas des Oiseaux Nicheurs de Bruxelles *by D. Rabosee, H de Wavrin, J Tricot and D van der Elst. AVES, Liege 1995. 304pp 895FB*

A well researched and detailed account of the breeding birds of the Brussels-Capitol region by AVES, the main Francophone ornithological club in Belgium. European Ornithological Atlas Committee guidelines are used with data as from the end of 1991. Visitors to Brussels with a spare day for birding should consult this book. It offers a good opportunity to compare our Atlas work with that of our Belgian colleagues and to brush up on your French!

Jim Mattocks

Swifts - A Guide to the Swifts and Treeswifts of the World *by Phil Chantler and Gerald Driessen Pica Press £26. ISBN 1-873403-31-3.*

All 96 species of the world's swifts and treeswifts are illustrated and described. The illustrations by Gerald Driessen are superb. The text is very detailed and enlivened by a large number of sketches and distribution maps. There are also 34 introductory pages which provide general information including interesting sections on feeding and ecological separation, watching swifts and one intriguingly entitled "Undescribed Species?"

Mark Holling

Waterston Library news

New Librarian Following the recent sad death of Bill Harper the Library Committee has appointed Dr John Law as Librarian. John has recently retired from the Edinburgh's Western General Hospital where he worked as a medical physicist. He has been an SOC member for many years but his professional duties kept him very busy. He is a keen hill walker and book collector. Keith McGregor, to whom we are greatly indebted, along with Frank Hamilton, for kindly standing in whilst we searched for a replacement Librarian, has agreed to take on the responsibility for the journal section of the library. John Ballantyne continues to do important work in sorting out our archival material.

Books/Journals for sale The Library always has a good selection of duplicate books for sale. These can be viewed in the display cases within the entrance hallway at Regent Terrace. In addition, we have extensive runs of duplicate journals, both bound and unbound for sale. These include *British Birds* back to the 1940's, *Scottish Naturalist* back to 1911, *Ibis* back to the 1950's and various others. If you are interested in starting or completing your own collection, please write to the Librarian indicating your wants and we will get back to you. Please note that we would expect people to collect any item bought from Regent Terrace.

Visiting The Library exists for the use of members and bona fida researchers. The collection of ornithological books and journals is unequalled in Scotland and we are keen to encourage its use. Until our new Librarian has settled in we suggest you telephone him at home **(0131 445 2427)** to confirm that someone is available to assist you, particularly if you intend to travel some distance or, alternatively, speak to our Secretary who should be able to indicate a suitable time for a visit.

David Clugston

Letters to the editor

32 Learmonth Place
St Andrews
Fife KY16 8XF
31st December 1995

The Editor
Scottish Bird News

Dear Sir,

I have noted that, in the last year or two a certain levity has crept into the pages of your distinguished publication. This trend began, I think, with Richard and Barbara Mearns' hilarious account in 1992 of a *Cornitholiday in Scoterland.* More recently wee Stanley *(a pleasant change from the more usual weightist abuse of some contributors, Ed)* prattled on about a gruesome trip through the Lairig and now, in SBN 40, Peter Gordon, the erstwhile likeable but now litigious laddie recently from Aberlady, is getting in on the act. Where will it all end?

This letter is not like that and is on a very serious topic. I note with great interest from SBN40 (p 11) that, despite the vigilance of the Editors, Great Black-backed Bulls have succeeded in establishing nesting colonies near Stornoway. This is fascinating since there are very few documented instances in the literature of same sex breeding; I would suggest, however, that there have may have been a misidentification of the species involved (perhaps another case of failing eyesight in an ageing observer?). It is much more likely that this record refers to Great Black-backed Bulbuls *Pycnonoses melanonotus.* To my knowledge there has been no previous record of this species nesting on Lewis or elsewhere in Scotland and, indeed, it has never before been recorded breeding, breathing or doing anything else whatsoever anywhere.....

Yours soberly, despite the date

Donald R Stewart

We are most grateful to DRS for pointing this out. The presence of what is originally an Asiatic species in the Stornoway area is less surprising when one considers the thriving Asian community now well established in the town; an interesting reversal of the trend for European species being introduced to other continents. Eds

Gaelic spelling

In the interesting review of birds and crofting in SBN40 the Gaelic translation of RSPB is not quite right. It should be An Comann Rioghail Airson Dion na h'eoin.

Pat Sandeman

Birdlog

This is a bird record management system for personal computers. It comprises a suite of programs running in DOS under Microsoft QBasic and is designed for easy adaptation to other operating systems. It is free to users and may be freely copied. It is suitable for ringing stations, observatories and reserves as well as for individual bird watchers. It allows sophisticated extraction and analysis of data, and will save many hours of clerical work. Birdlog will be upgraded each year on 1 January. For a copy, please write to: **J R Barnes, The Holt, Newton Valence, nr Alton, Hampshire GU34 3RB.** In EC, enclose £3.50 or equivalent to cover copying and postage, £4.50 elsewhere. Please make cheques payable to J R Barnes.

Scottish garden bird watch

The BTO's new format Garden Bird Watch started in January 1995. It is aimed at assessing the biological importance of gardens and has proved very popular with almost 5,000 participants. Garden Bird Watch entails keeping weekly peak counts of species using observers' gardens. The data collected is being used to monitor regional, seasonal, and in, time, year to year changes in the array of birds that use our gardens. The garden bird picture is changing rapidly with for example increases in Siskin, Blackcap, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Magpie and Sparrowhawk but declines in Song Thrush and House Sparrow. Interesting changes in behaviour recorded include Long-tailed Tits and Goldfinches coming to peanuts and seed mixes. To cover administrative expenses there is an annual registration fee of £10. Participants receive a quarterly newsletter *The Bird Table* and discount vouchers redeemable on purchases of food or feeders from C J Wildbird Foods. Any interested SOC member should contact **Tracey Brookes, Garden Bird Watch, BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU or phone 01842 750050.**

David Glue

Spring break on Fair Isle

Breeding studies of Fair Isle Starlings have been undertaken by Peter Evans since 1980. Anyone interested in helping with this project by counting and identifying colour ringed Starlings on Fair Isle in late May/early June 1996 please contact me as soon as possible. Hopefully grants will be available to cover travel and accommodation costs. Spring migrants and huge seabird colonies provide wonderful distractions at this time. **Rik Smith, ICAPB, University of Edinburgh, West Mains Road, Edinburgh, EH9 3JD. Tel. 0131-650-5515.**

MEMBERS' REQUESTS

Colour marked Greylag Geese

Sightings of Greylags bearing dye marks, darvic rings or neck collars, together with details of colours and letters seen (no matter how incomplete), should be sent to: **Brian Etheridge, "Morven", Station Road, Avoch, Ross-shire, IV9 8RW. Telephone 01381 620098 (home) or 01463 715000 (work).**

Colour ringed Ring Ouzels

A number of birds have been individually colour ringed. Any sightings of colour ringed Ring Ouzels will be greatly appreciated by **David Arthur, 12 Dundee Street, Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7PD. 01241 853356.**

Colour ringed Stonechats

All sightings will be acknowledged by **Andrew Thorpe, 30 Monearn Gardens, Milltimber, Aberdeen AB1 1YP**

Colour ringed Mute Swans - Lothian & Fife

Sightings should be sent to **Allan & Lyndesay Brown, 61 Watt's Gardens, Cupar, Fife, KY15 4UG (Telephone 01334 656804)** from whom further information can be obtained on the study.

Wing tagged Hen Harriers

Details of any sightings however incomplete should be sent to **Brian Etheridge, RSPB North Scotland Office, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW tel 01463 715000** as soon as possible.

Wing tagged Red Kites and Sea Eagles

see SBN 40: pages 3 & 14

SOC NOTICES

200 Club

Winners in the fourth quarter of 1995 were:

October - 1st £30 Capt. J I Owen, Melrose; 2nd £20 R Caine, Eyemouth; 3rd £10 Miss M H Knox, Edinburgh
November - 1st £100 J Walker, Leeds; 2nd £75 D Maciver, Stornoway; 3rd £50 J H Ballantyne, Edinburgh; 4th £30 J H B Munro, Edinburgh; 5th £20 Miss I W C Hunter, Ayr; 6th £10 S R da Prato, Tranent
December - 1st £30 Mrs J E Shepherd, Dundee; 2nd £20 R Caine, Eyemouth; 3rd £10 - R H Hogg, Maybole

The end of May will see the completion of the seventh year of the 200 Club. In that time over £12,000 will have been raised, half of which has been returned to its members in monthly prizes varying from £10 to £100, and the other £6000 given to the SOC for internal refurbishment of 21 Regent Terrace. In 1995/96 a further £1000 was spent on renewing obsolete night store heaters; the last ones will be renewed after 1 June 1996. At the time of writing this notice in January, 26 members had shared 27 prizes (one member won twice), and there are still 15 more prizes to be won in the next four months. The odds of winning a prize during the year - 4 to 1 - are far better than the national lottery! *(is there any competition that isn't? Eds)*. Thank you for your continued support and help to the SOC.

The 200 Club "year" starts on 1 June and renewal notices to its existing members, who pay by cheque or cash, will be sent out in the next few weeks. Anyone who would like to join, or take out a second membership, should write to me enclosing a cheque for £12, payable to 'SOC 200 Club', which will cover the 12 months from 1 June. Your cheque will be acknowledged. If you would like to pay by Banker's Order please contact me and I will send you a form. **Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL (01896 822176)**

Thanks to

Thanks are once again due to the army of volunteers who willingly come into 21 every quarter and stuff envelopes. The stuffers for the December mailing are: Ian & Catherine Craig, Rosemary Davidson, Pete Gordon, Sue Goode, Frank Hamilton, Hetty Harper, Keith McGregor, Bob & Betty Smith, Paul Speak, Noreen Stabler, Myra Sutter, Ethel Russell and last, but not least, Joan Wilcox.

Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices need to be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The magazine acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and to disseminate information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. The views expressed in articles in *Scottish Bird News* are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication. The SOC also publishes the journal *Scottish Birds* which publishes original papers and notes on Scottish Ornithology and the *Scottish Bird Report*. For details of these publications and membership contact the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Discussion Group

The south east Scotland Discussion Group meets monthly in the Library at 21 Regent Terrace to talk about fieldwork, surveys and local conservation issues. For example topics in January included a repeat of the low tide counts from Gullane to the English Border, a Goosander count in the Tweed catchment area and a discussion on how to get meaningful, locally relevant data on bird densities in different habitats to assist the calculation of population estimates for the south east Scotland Breeding Atlas project. Not all meetings are quite so serious. Sometimes participants organise informal slide shows. Other topics on the agenda this year are the BTO Rook survey, the call for legalised killing of raptors and our now annual summer social.

A tradition has developed whereby we take it in turns to provide refreshments; home baking being particularly popular.

All members are welcome to attend, whether you live locally or come from afar. Meetings start at 7.30pm and are normally on the first Wednesday of the month apart from the summer. The dates for the rest of the year are: 10 April (note this is not the first Wednesday), 4 September, 2 October, 6 November and 4 December. The first meeting of 1997 will be on 8 January 1997.

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